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THE CRUCIFIX OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS: PUTIN'S RUSSIA; MISSION AND STRENGTH

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Abstract:

That Russia could be reversed, into penury, global irrelevance and domestic slide starting from the 1990s, not only appeared humanly un-daunting and historically anachronistic by almost all calculations. Breaking from the sleazy Yeltsin past, marching sturdily towards restoring Russia's power and prestige, Putin's blunt, occasionally coarse style and energetic demeanor appears to have successfully galvanized the electorate against the country's unwieldiness and institutionalized bureaucratic subtle sabotage. Beset with systemic diseases post the Soviet Union's collapse, Putin inherited a sick country in every sense of word. Determined to liberate and propel Russia within a twenty-years period, into one of the top few most developed nations in the world, Putin through myriads of sweeping administrative changes has placed previously extremely powerful oligarchs in check, scared governors, leveled Chechen villages, and annexed Crimea, through an admixture of modernized authoritarianism and reformist democracy. Applying more than a brains trust, Putin surprisingly in transforming Russia, has not allowed Russia to transform him. Just as the fear of a future that might prove even worse (a roll back to the past), is complemented with a generalized popular love. To the West, Russia's strides is no more an illusion, most especially with its indelible nationalistic gait imbued with Putin's guerilla tactics foreign recognition policy approach. Putin's Russia is simply back to global assertiveness and recognition. Could this be a lesson in statecraft? Call him the new Czar or Stalin, one clear issue is that in the 21st century, it's becoming pretty difficult to demarcate the Russia federation from the personality of Vladimir Putin.

Keywords: *Authoritarianism, Democracy, Bureaucracy, Nationalism, Domineering*

INTRODUCTION:

“Officials, the social network and television will help us realize that we cherish everything he loves and hate everything he scorns. Once Putin is gone, the hate which inevitably follows will be proportionate to this current love of him – and just as blind with our illusions once shattered, we will see the objects of our erstwhile affection for what they really are – cynical, deceitful, ineffectual demagogues. Then, we have to loathe them for the violence, fear and destruction they bring into our lives¹.”

But there is more to the propaganda-induced lionization of Putin than meets the eye. It is the very Russia trait: loving the boss just for the virtue of being the boss for as long as he is the boss, above the fray and beyond reproach-the nation’s little father. The Russians loved their Czars from the grandeur of their empire. They loved Lenin for destroying the hated Czarist Empire. They loved Stalin for restoring the national Empire and purging the hated Lenin’s Bolsheviks who had abused Russia for the benefit of the World revolution. They loved Khrushchev for ending the hated Stalinist yoke and mass terror, and Brezhnev for ending the hated Khrushchev follies and arbitrariness. They loved Gorbachev for putting an end to the hated Brezhnev stagnation, and replacing totalitarianism with a semblance of freedom. They loved Yeltsin for putting an end to the hated Gorbachev vacillations and for launching long- awaited reforms. Today, the nation hates Yeltsin for his decade of national humiliation, chaos and poverty, and loves Putin for his emergent orderly strong state and the repair of wounded national pride. Reforming all areas of Russian State power is easier said than done.

Putin inherited a sick country, in every sense of the word – its population declined by 900,000 in 1999, male life expectancy around 60, stood at Third World levels – better than Nigeria but worse than Philippines – and is about 3.5 years lower than three decades ago (women here lived over 10 years longer). Alcohol has killed millions of working men. Russia was also beset by other systemic diseases, foremost among them, corruption. Few of Russia’s 50 richest men could explain how they moved from being minor officials to billionaires in half a decade post the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991². The ‘Godfather’ took a center stage as the ultimate symbol of state-sponsored

corruption and cynical manipulation of power, even under Boris Yeltsin. Amongst the myriads of social problems, drug usage soared among Russia's young, as their hopes for a better future remain continuously dashed by graft and incompetence. To worsen the precarious situation, the arbitrary domestic crime quotient. A bizarre atmosphere of extreme wealth vis-à-vis extreme poverty prevailed. Chechnya, not only continued to defy several security solutions as not only a breakaway entity within the Russian Federation, but as a dangerous and portent/Islamic fundamentalist terrorist haven. The fundamental problem in Russia was no longer between communists and democrats, but that of challenging domestic security and a fight in the economy between people who have opposing ideas about what a market is. Considering that Russia's remaining riches is - 31% of the world's proven oil reserves and 36% of its natural gas reserves³, to properly harness this would not only require outgrowing Russia out of the 'paternal state model' that plagued it since Czarism, but a strong, passionate and dedicated personality who would put the rules of the game and force everyone to play by them. Perhaps, it should be noted at this juncture, that besides these seemingly intractable domestic problems, on the foreign platform, the challenges amounted towards urgently strengthening and improving Russia's international standing and relations, which coupled with its military capabilities continued to nose-drive.

Drawing an analogy on the proper condition of the Russian Federation before Vladimir Putin intervened apparently enables this study to assess, evaluate and appreciate trending conditions over what is actually obtainable and within a given period.

VLADIMIR PUTIN – A DATE WITH RUSSIA AND THE 21ST CENTURY WORLD

In December 1999, Boris Yeltsin resigned as president of Russia, and appointed Putin as Acting president until official elections were held, and in March 2000, Putin was elected to his first term with 53 percent of the votes⁴. Promising economic, political and strategic/structural reforms, he vowed to once more, make Russia great again. Quite aware that these goals could forever remain a mirage, he vehemently set about restructuring the government and launching criminal investigation into the business dealings of high-profile Russian citizens, while bringing more professionalism and doggedness in Russia's military campaign in Chechnya.

Control over the economy was increased by placing individuals from the intelligence services and the military, in key positions of Russian economy,

including on Boards of large companies. Fully aware of and convinced about the cumulative importance of industrialization to 21st century developing economy, in 2005 an Industry Consolidation Programme was launched, directed at bringing the major air craft producing companies under a single umbrella organization – the United Aircraft corporation (UAC)⁵, meant for and geared towards competing favorably with other major European plane-manufacturing companies, as a profitable national champion. In doing so, while losses were minimized, production lines were optimized. Through Putin’s good initiative, an internationally arranged programme operated, termed ‘a fund for oil revenue’, which allowed and enabled Russia to repay all the Soviet Union’s debts by 2005⁶.

Towards eliminating widespread barter within the Russian federation and boosting the economy, Vladimir Putin proactively engaged in economic diversification. A programme was started to increase Russia’s share of the European energy market by building submerged gas pipelines, by-passing Ukraine and other countries, which were often seen as non-reliable transit partners by Russia, especially following Russia-Ukraine gas disputes of the late 2000s (decades). Through a swift tactical arrangement, Putin went forward to undermine the rival gas pipeline project- Nabucco, by buying over the preferable Turkmen gas Depot, and redirecting it into Russian pipelines-(enhancement of Russian monopoly on the regional gas supplies). In furtherance of the country in the export area, Putin’s Russia built the Trans-Siberian Oil Pipeline, targeting the markets of China, Japan and Korea, as well as the Sakhalin-Khabarovsk-Vladivostok gas pipelines in the Russian far east. In furtherance of its grip on this economically lucrative and geopolitically important venture, Putin’s Russia went on to build several major oil and gas refineries, plants and ports, major hydropower plants, such as the Bureya and Boguchary dams, as well as the restoration and modernization of the indefatigable nuclear industry with over 1trillion rubles (\$42.7billion) before 2015⁷. Today, the resultant product is the many floating mobile nuclear powered energy-producing ships used in providing energy to previously-challenged areas within the Russian Federation, like the arctic coastal cities and gas rigs. Much of this work is undertaken through the auspices of Rosatom, the state corporation which even successfully executes such nuclear power contracts in many other overseas sovereignties on contract basis.

Under Putin’s administration (2001 to 2007)’the economy made real gains of an average 7% per year, making it the 7th largest economy in the world in purchasing power. In fact, production, construction, real incomes, credit and the middle class grew and exhibited tremendous progress. On 22nd August

2012, Putin's Russia joined the world trade organization, and as a major oil exporter, deployed its company-Rosnefer towards engaging with Exxon Mobil for a lucrative Arctic Oil Production relying on Russia's world's first ice-resistant offshore Arctic oil platform. In order to cushion the effects of the myriad of economic sanctions directed on it from the West, Putin's Russia pulled a deal with China/Russia jointly funded \$77billion pipeline, which would continue to deliver \$400billion worth of natural gas to China for a 30-year period.

Putin's controversial domestic policies and changes surprisingly appear to know no bounds, as it spiraled into the social/identity realm. In December 2012, Putin signed into law a ban on the United States adoption of Russian children, thereby sparking off international controversy. He went forward to upset many people, most especially on the international area with his anti-gay laws, which made it illegal for gay couples to adopt in Russia, including the stoppage of propagandizing nontraditional sexual relationships to minors. These laws directly served as master-stroke checkmating the high level western orchestrated social influence and inundation of Russian society and values. Putin's Russia continues to ratchet and maintain a tough stance on internal security, since true to form, no prisoners are taken. Poised towards hosting a secure winter Olympics at Sochi, Russia in 2014, Putin's Russia implemented new measures aimed at cracking down on Muslim extremists, through the collection of saliva samples from some Muslim women in the North Caucasus region as from November, 2013. These samples were ostensibly used to gather DNA profiles, in an effort to combat female suicide bombers known as 'black widows'⁸. On the other hand, it may not be wrong to say that in the guise of ensuring and maintaining internal security, many aspects of fundamental human rights remain marginalized and infringed on. It maybe poignant to note that for Vladimir Putin to have maintained an uninterrupted grip on power over a relatively long period, considering the constitutional dictates and checks, enormous understanding and recognition goes to his protégé, Dmitry Medvedev who not only succeeded him as President in March, 2008, but quickly appointed him as Russian Prime Minister, hence allowing him to continue on a primary position of influence for another four years. Overseeing a constitutional amendment which allowed the president to rather stay for a six-year term, he went forward to even run as an independent candidate in early 2018, basking in enormous domestic popularity and support.

Any thesis on Putin's Russia devoid of the intriguing and amazing facelift which the defence industry is exposed to would simply present a yawning gap. Renovation and rehabilitation as explanatory words may defectively sound and

lack adequate explanatory details towards analyzing the innovation servicing that sector. Fully aware of the part and message a strong and proactive military would play and send, more so in contemporary 21st global political murky waters, Putin has made the Russian army more like the soviet army it replaced. A viable tool in the international chess game indeed, apart from the litany of newly-developed lethal weapons, in March 2018, during his annual address to Parliament, Putin boasted of new weaponry that would render NATO defenses “completely worthless”, including a low-flying nuclear capable cruise missile with unlimited range, and another one capable of travelling at hypersonic speed⁹. A nationalistic message indeed meant to bolster Russian ego and respect internationally, and also a defiant deterrence package to the prowling West, playing around the carcass of the dreadful Soviet Union. It may be recalled that Russia’s conventional forces are the largest on the European continent¹⁰.

A serious and unforgivable fundamental gap would be created in this study, if enough space is not given in analyzing the foreign strides and involvement of Putin’s Russia on global affairs. Though seen and evaluated from many perspectives, Putin’s Russia, on March 18th, 2018, the fourth anniversary of the country’s seizure and annexation of Crimea, overwhelmingly elected Putin to a fourth presidential term, with 67 percent of the electorate turning out to award him more than 76 percent of the votes¹¹. Such is the trend, the popularity of the leader whose strategies for rebuilding the country as a global power is not wavering at all. Though lacking the penchant of talking, it may be recalled that in September 2001, in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States, Putin announced Russia’s support for the United States in its anti-terror campaign, however, when this war on terror shifted focus to ousting the Iraqi Leader-Saddam Hussein, Putin’s Russia joined the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schroder and French president Jacques Chirac in opposition of the plan. Relations with the West continued to deteriorate when in 2002, Putin vehemently opposed the continued expansion of NATO during the Prague Summit. He was quoted as saying thus:

“There were three questions which most concerned Russia and Eastern Europe, namely the status of Kosovo, the plans to build missile defence sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, and suggested that all three were somehow linked, hence concession on one of these questions on the western side might be met with concessions from Russia on another¹².”

Putin's Russia's strained relationship with the United States and the West continued to nose-drive, when in February 2007, at the annual Munich conference on security policy he openly criticized what it termed the United States monopolistic dominance in global relations and pointed out that the United States displayed an 'almost uncontained hyper use of force in international relations, hence no one feels safe and so stimulates an arms race'¹³. Putin didn't mince words when he favored a democratic multi-polar world and of strengthening the system of international law¹⁴. The months following Putin's Munich speech were marked by tension and a surge in rhetoric on both sides of the Atlantic. Consequently, on the anniversary of Russia's Victory day, Putin 'stood on the top of Russia' to reiterate thus:

"These threats are not becoming fewer, but are only transforming and changing their appearance. These new threats, just as under the Third Reich, show the same contempt for human life and the same aspiration to establish an exclusive dictate over the world"¹⁵.

Many western Commentators and apologists had an opportunity to reply to this accusation during the 33rd summit of the G-8 in Heiligendamm when an American journalist asserted thus:

"Whether by waging cyber warfare on Estonia, threatening the gas supplies of Lithuania, or boycotting Georgian wine and Polish meat, Putin has, over the past few years, made it clear that he intends to reassert Russian influence with former communist state of Europe, whether those states want Russian influence or not. At the same time, he has also made it clear that he no longer sees western nations as mere benign trading partners, but rather as cold war-style threats"¹⁶.

British historian, Max Hasting described Putin as "Stalin's spiritual heir" in his article "will we have to fight Russia in this century"¹⁷? However, Adi Ignatius argues that 'Putin is not Stalin; there are no mass purges in Russia today, no broad climate of terror. But Putin is reconstituting a strong state, and anyone who stands in his way will pay for it'¹⁸. In the same article, Hastings continues that although 'a reform to direct military confrontation of the cold war is unlikely, the notion of western friendship with Russia is a dead letter'¹⁹. Amongst the litany of the presumed sins of Putin's Russia include its public opposition to a US missile shield in Europe, but rather presented to President

George Bush with the counter-proposal of sharing the use of the soviet-era radar system in Azerbaijan in place of building a new system in Poland and the Czech Republic. Apparently met with an abject lack of understanding and un-cooperation, evidenced by the continuation of this project by the West, and the US, Putin's Russia refusing to be frustrated, daftly admitted that 'if part of the United States' nuclear capability is situated in Europe, and that our military experts consider that they represent a potential threat, then we will have to take appropriate retaliatory steps. What steps? Of course we must have new targets in Europe'²⁰. Bringing more clarity to this position, Putin declared thus; we do not want confrontation, we want to engage in dialogue. However, we want a dialogue that acknowledges the equality of both parties interests²¹.

It may be recalled that the end of 2006 brought strained relations between Russia and Britain in the wake of the death of a defected former Russian Spy in London by poisoning – Alexander Litvinenko. Putin's Russia was not only fingered, but vehemently refused to extradite to the United Kingdom an ex-spy who was accused of executing this 'dirty' job, citing the prohibition placed by the Russian Constitution on the extradition of Russian nationals to third countries. In response to an advice from British Foreign Secretary suggesting that Putin's Russia ought to move along (just like other European counterparts) and alter its constitutional provision in this matter, Putin advised the British officials to rather 'fix their heads', rather than proposing such, since such proposals were a relic of a colonial-era mindset²². Putin's Russia vehemently responded by expelling equal amount of their own diplomats sent away from Britain.

Undeterred by varied global perception, more so of western alleged aggressiveness, Putin's Russia accelerated towards breaking new boundaries – Russian/Chinese joint military exercises under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Council took off in 2007; attended and signed a memorandum of understanding in the APEC Caspian Summit in Sydney, Australia September 2007, including leaders of the Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and G-20 Summits in Brisbane in 2014. In 2015, Putin's Russia formed the Eurasia Economic Union with Armenia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Putin's Russia, an active member of many international organizations, and a portent mediator and actor in several international conflicts, its territorial dispute with Japan over the Kuril Islands appears to have chosen the path of diplomacy rather than conflict.

Just as the West, against Russian opinion, supported Kosovo's independence, Russia later used this 'Kosovo precedent' as its justification for its annexation

of Crimea, including its support of the breakaway states in Georgia and Moldova²³. To this, the West has since put in place, and has continued to step up economic embargo on Putin's Russia. According to *Japan Times*, Putin's Russia has systematically increased its economic support for North Korea, in an effort to balance against a potential US-led push to topple the Kim Jung-Un regime²⁴. In the event of regime collapse, Russia is worried about losing regional influence as well as the possibility of American troops being deployed to Russia's Eastern border²⁵. One may rightly observe that while the West views Putin's Russia policies towards the post-soviet states as 'bullying'²⁶, the same observer appears not to recognize the apparent natural appendage existing between some of them who are Russo-centric. Be it as it may, through a statement exhibiting vision, mission, consistency and strength, Putin tersely cautioned thus:

"Russia's foreign policy has always been and will remain self-sufficient and independent. It is consistent, successive and represents the unique role of our country in world affairs and civilization development. It has nothing to do with isolationism or confrontation, and provides for integration into global processes. We will continue to strongly defend the United Nations Charter as a basis of the modern world order, and we will continue to push for everyone to proceed from the fact that only the United Nations Security Council has the right to make decisions in cases requiring the use of force²⁷."

Some analyst suggests that the mid 2010 is the start of a new cold war between Putin's Russia and the West, since the two sides found themselves backing opposing groups in the Syrian civil war. While Putin's Russia dismiss the US as **domineering**, the US on the other hand view the Kremlin as **obstructionist**, regarding its support for Basher al Assad government. When in 2013, the Kremlin granted asylum to Edward Snowden(whistleblower), the US for the first time since 1960, cancelled a proposed summit with Russia, A turning, point dawned on the realm of international affairs and relations, When in October 2015, after years of supporting the Syrian government indirectly, Putin's Russia directly intervened in the conflict, turning the tide in the favor of the Assad regime, despite its official assertions that the military actions were intended to target the extremist Islamic State. Putin's Russia time motives were called into question. Today, apart from the on-going accusation and investigation of alleged Kremlin's tacit involvement in the 2016 U.S. election hacks, another

drama played out in the recent British accusation of Kremlin's involvement in the poisoning of Skripal and his daughter (defected Russian spy) with a high-grade chemical agent (Novachok) In the United Kingdom.

REFLECTIONS

Oil and gas are the most Kremlin's main foreign policy weapons and its main tool of ensuring internal stability. The rise in oil prices in the early 2000s made Putin what he is today. Gas is also the main leverage he has over the EU. Putin's Russia is Europe's main Exporter of gas and currently provides 50 percent of its gas needs. Gas and oil pipeline are Kremlin's main tool of control over energy exporting countries in central Asia, like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. But this is also the weakness of Putin's system. Russia's economy continues to grow more dependent on the export of energy resources and today, they account for more than 60 percent of all exports. Nordstream-2 a gas pipeline meant to increase the supply of Russian gas to northern Europe especially, Germany. Nordstream is Putin's brainchild and is important not just from an economic perspective, it is meant to increase Russia leverage over Europe. Putin has already invested a lot of diplomatic, lobbyist and financial resources in the project.

Putin's Russia in befriending some sovereignties in the Middle East, and across the world, remains guided by certain designate trending and important-aims and objectives (Russian national security and global economic-political equilibrium): to counter fulminating western depredations, domination, command and control of the international system. Towards effecting this, Putin has continued to steer Russian foreign policy successfully through thinly-laid subtle maneuvers which encompass posing as a reliable strong alternative and friend in place of the US to the Arab world and Europeans, and equally as an old *comradie* to the Chinese and Asians. Check out this equation: Israel has its closest ally and supporter as the US, the US clearly detests and suspects every move made by Russia; both Israel and the US cannot afford to utterly disagree with Russia, at least for the sake of safeguarding and maintaining Israeli survival and security -Russia produces and possesses abundant lethal weaponry that would readily arm the Israeli adversaries (Arabs) thereby altering the subsisting Middle East power organogram. On the other hand, Putin has economic-compactly continued to build and advance a proactive Euro-operational underground gas network, which like an octopus, webbed even into some of his ardent western-oriented political belligerents like Ukraine. In opposing and standing Putin's Russia, the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, among others must be cautious, in order to secure their individual national securities, including those of their close allies. That nuclear armed North Korea shares borders with Putin's Russia and China, does

not command a mere geopolitics of a lethal proxy, but a delicate interphase in the East/West chess-board. Considering the part played by Putin's Russia in the control of international oil market/supply with the cooperation of Saudi Arabia as the largest OPEC oil producer, this elicits attention and cautious observation.

In the midst of overwhelming western offensive assault, Putin's Russia views contrition as weakness, and so applies accusations as a nationalistic sentiment. Russia appears willing to cooperate with US in Syria; but only as a first step towards addressing more fundamental differences with Washington. Indeed, Russia's intervention in Syria has much broader objectives than merely keeping Bashar al Assad in power.

After more than three decades of withdrawing from the world stage and turning its back on the Middle East, Russia took almost everyone by surprise (off guard) with its September 2015 military intervention in Syria. Indeed, Putin had pursued aggressive foreign policies elsewhere (Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014). Yet, these ventures were seen as very much defensive. Since the end of the Cold war, NATO has been expanding eastward with little regard for Russia's security interests. For Putin, the possibility that Georgia and Ukraine would become members in a new wave of NATO expansion was very real; and he, therefore had to act swiftly.

Syria was in a different category. It was Russia's first post-cold war power projection outside the territories of the former Soviet Union. Taking advantage of US war fatigue, the Syrian crisis presented Putin with the opportunity to overcome "trauma" of the collapse of the Soviet Union and re-establish Russia as a world Power. Putin's Russia has succeeded in preserving the regime of Al Assad and preventing a victory by the US-backed opposition, but the notice behind Russia's military intervention in Syria go beyond internal dynamics of the Syrian conflicts. It was first and foremost about Russia's international standing and geographical interests. Putin's Russia has in fact used Syria as a launching pad to reassert itself on the international arena and attempt to change the uni-polar nature of the post-cold war international system. Iran was an important tool towards achieving that end. In 2015 (July) when Bashar al Assad and his Iran-backed forces seemed to have been defeated, and with the Soviet/Afghanistan imbroglio very much alive in Russian memory, Putin's Russia decided to provide air cover (testing the waters), with no boots on the ground, to tilt the balance in favor of Assad; under the cover of fighting ISIL. While Iran provided manpower on the ground, Russia provided fire from the air.

Putin's Russia views Iran as an important partner in its Syrian venture (achieving common objectives as defeating western-backed rebellion in Syria, prevention of Turkey and Arab Gulf States from winning the war in Syria, taking revenge of the removal by the rest of a Russian ally in Libya). However, a divergence started emerging as the interests of the two: Russia wants to use Syrian gains as a bargaining chip with the West (US) to get to the most fundamental issues – Ukraine and economic sanctions, while Iran wants to enhance its military presence in Syria as a deterrence to prevent a possible US or Israeli attack against it. As the US and Israel show more determination towards forcing Iran out of Syria, Putin's role becomes untenable. If he decides to hold on to the alliance with Iran, Washington and Tel Aviv's effort to roll Iran's influence back are more likely to fail. Clearly, Putin is holding the key to this issue.

CONCLUSION

The Kremlin's propaganda has succeeded in achieving that over and over again, like it did in 2014, when it persuaded most Russians and Germans that the annexation of the peninsula is an act of defence against the existential threat posed by Ukrainian nationalists and their western backers. When you convince the entire population of a country that it is at war, -even if, truly there's none insight – demands for democratic procedure, due process, deliberation and nuance vanish into thin air. The Kremlin's propaganda has succeeded in achieving that over and over again. One cannot complete this study without reflecting on the perceived and controversial allegation of Russia's interference, in the last US presidential elections. Russian meddling may or may not have had an impact on the outcome of the US election in 2016, but Putin has definitely succeeded in one thing: he has infected the US with the same paranoia about the threat from an external enemy and the fifth column, which Russia has been suffering from for years. The "besieged fortress complex" which the Kremlin's propaganda has managed to implant in the minds of millions of Russians is now very much part of the American psyche-particularly the anti-Trump side. Now the US has been sucked into the whirlpool of collective hysteria and it is gradually adapting *Stalin-esque* language of "espionage" and foreign agents. At this juncture, the position of this study which stands to be controverted, is that Vladimir Putin is the strongest and most experienced contemporary world president. By the time he would have completed his program for Russia, all will not be the same.

Putin's Russia has added glamour to vision and strength most especially on the global domain with the successful hosting of the FIFA World Cup which ended

in July, 2018. Amidst the strong and tempestuous politics of boycott staged prior to the event by both British and western elements at the high point of the Skirpal's poisoning imbroglio, added to the massive ejection of many Russian diplomats from the US and western nations, followed by retaliatory ejections from Russia, Putin's Russia showcased a standard outing in event management, provision of security, including a friendly atmosphere and composure which kept many critics aghast. Putin, showcased as a strong 'black-belter' KGB man, has not lost his recollections of his grandfather's days as a cook for Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. An orthodox Christian to the core, he has had the long history of encouraging the construction and restoration of thousands of churches in the region through their mandatory registration with the government. Even Muslims are made to comply to strict Russian rules and specifications in the conduct of their religion, hence suicide bombing and extremism continue to find it difficult a home in Putin's Russia. Russia is on the path of a global power, that it is already providing reasonable checks on certain excesses of the West.

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