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PUTIN'S RUSSIA

Over the past decade and a half, Vladimir Putin's Russia has been an economic dynamo and a basket case, an imperfect democracy and a tightening tyranny, a constructive diplomatic actor and a serial military aggressor—sometimes all at once. The only constant has been surprise, as the zigging and zagging has left outside observers, and even many Russians, scratching their heads.

We asked several of the world's leading Russia experts to take stock of the country under Putin, analyzing where things are and where they're going. The result is a sharp portrait of a wounded but still powerful bear—a country strong enough to demand attention and respect, yet too weak to impose its will on the world; proud of its history and traditions, yet too insecure to tolerate free political activity; rich enough to spend vast sums on pet projects, yet too corrupt and constrained to prosper.

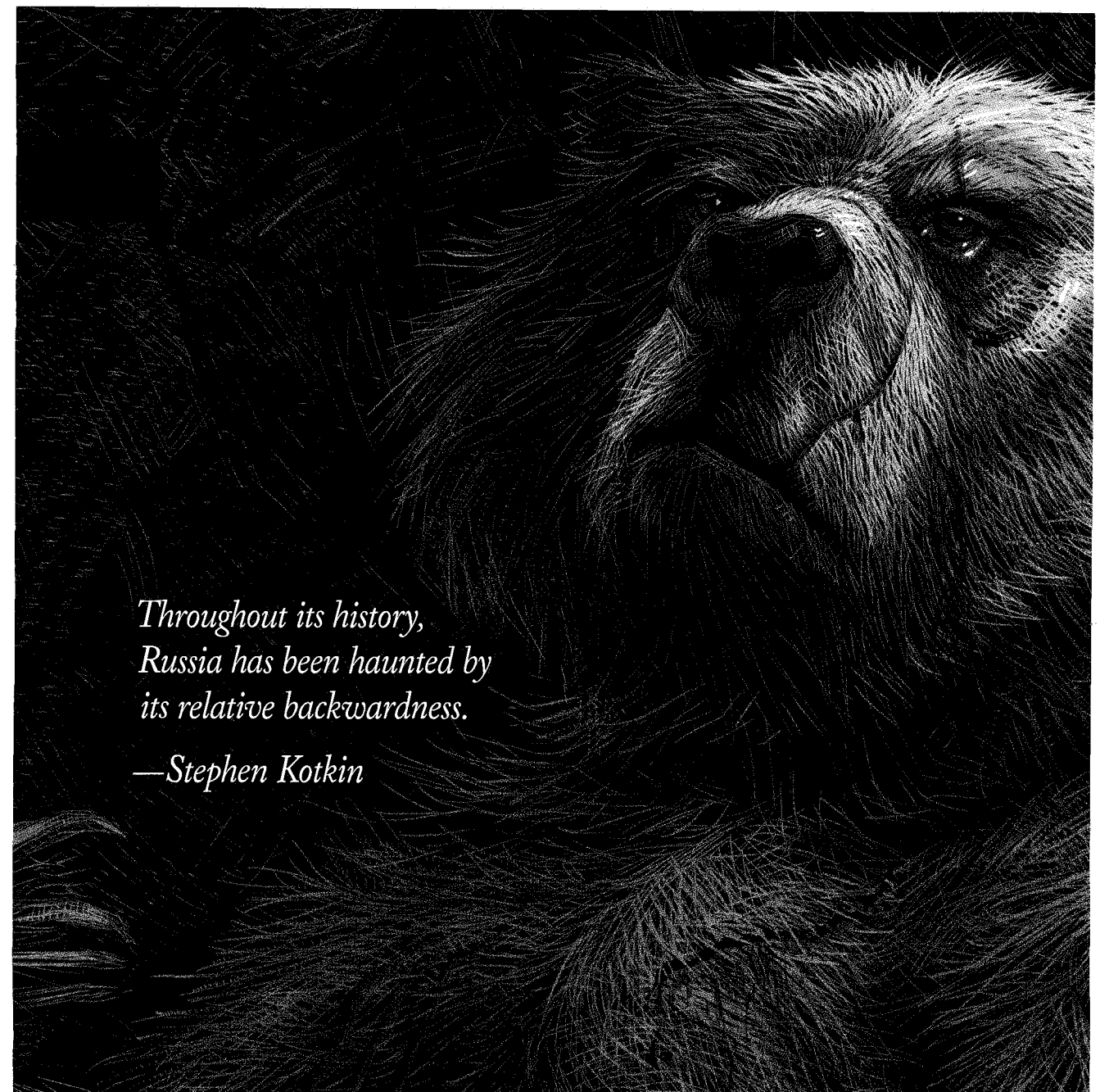
Stephen Kotkin kicks the package off with a whirlwind tour of Russian history, showing how today's anti-Western resentment, centralized power, and sense of special destiny represent not aberrations but a return to the centuries-old norm.

Gleb Pavlovsky, a former Kremlin insider, explains how politics works under Putin, highlighting the role of *sistema*, Russia's deep state, in driving all major outcomes. Sergei Guriev and Dmitri Trenin assess Russia's economy and military, respectively, concluding that the latter is doing much better than the former.

Fyodor Lukyanov puts Putin's foreign policy in the context of the post-Cold War era, and Maria Lipman traces how the Kremlin maintains control by cracking down on dissent. Finally, Daniel Treisman provides an authoritative account of Putin's decision to invade Crimea, arguing that it was less a response to Western moves or a deliberate act of imperial revanchism than the impulsive gamble of a leader worried about losing a key military base.

Together, these articles suggest pessimism about the future of Putin's regime, which has glaring structural weaknesses and limited prospects for advancement. But they also suggest that it does not pose a major imminent threat to world peace and stability. The current chapter of Russia's story is unlikely to end well, yet external pressure or provocation seems likely to inflame the situation rather than improve it. Dealing with such a challenge successfully will require a careful hand and a combination of firmness, prudence, and patience.

—Gideon Rose, *Editor*



*Throughout its history,
Russia has been haunted by
its relative backwardness.*

—Stephen Kotkin

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