

Two Problems for the Next President of the United States

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By Michael Curtis for the American Thinker: For the next president of the United States, it is important to take account of two pressing issues, the continuing war in Afghanistan and the political and strategic intentions of Russian president Vladimir Putin. At a moment when there is controversy over American policy in Afghanistan, where 3,500 troops have been killed, it is useful for the president to be given a timely warning of the consequences of incursion into the graveyard of empires. A moving and sad account of the predicament of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979-1988 is provided in the book *The Hidden War*, by the courageous Russian journalist, Artyom Borovik. Though young, he was a major figure in investigatory journalism in Russia before his untimely death in an airplane crash in March 2000 – a death that may not have been accidental. Borovik writes of a war of aggression in a rugged country, badly led, fought without a clear strategy and with self-deception of Russian leaders. He tells of the feelings and the stories of soldiers, their commanders, the deserters, the suicides, the pain and suffering and the sagging morale of the troops, the brutality to each other, the bribery, profiteering, and corruption, the use of drugs and hashish, and the postwar traumatic stress. It was a war that, in Borovik's view, produced nothing. Few knew what they were fighting for. More than 14,500 Russians were killed, and more than a million civilians lost their lives. It was the Soviet Union at its twilight, nine years of wasted effort and resources. In a merciless, and somewhat exaggerated, book, *The Man without a Face*, Masha Gessen has written of Putin as a gangster, vulgar, cruel, emotionless figure who imprisoned opponents and is guilty of or involved in murder of critics, including Alexander Litvinenko in London and Anna Politkovskaya, Sergei Magnitsky, and Boris Nemtsov in Moscow. Gessen also accuses Putin of amassing personal wealth, almost a kleptomaniac, greedily involved in embezzling state funds as the godfather of a Mafia clan ruling the country. Whatever the truth of these personal accusations, Putin strengthened both his own position and central power in Russia. He falsified election results in December 2011, an action that led to a large demonstration in Moscow, and he is the automatic victor of the presidential election to be held in September 2018. He has noticeably relied heavily on an inner circle, many related to the former KGB, now the FSB. In a surprising action, in August 2016 he replaced his longtime aide, his chief of staff Sergei Ivanov, a former KGB agent, with his deputy Anton Vaino. None of those aides appears to have any political clout or identity. […] http://www.americanthinker.com/article/3562/two_problems_for_the_next_president_of_the_united_states.html