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Putin vs The West: Insights from Norma Percy's Documentary



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Norma Percy's Documentaries: A Deep Dive into the West's Relationship with Putin

Norma Percy is an award-winning political analyst who has produced numerous political documentaries that are deemed heavyweight. Her documentaries feature the big players who were directly involved in the decision-making, ranging from special advisers to world leaders. This immensely adds to the credibility of her documentaries. Norma Percy has utilized the medium of BBC Select. This three-part documentary comprises three parts - My Backyard, Back with a Vengeance, and A Dangerous Path. The documentary entails a decade-long story of clashes – from the Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014 to the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, from the prism of the Western leaders of how they dealt with Russia under Putin. Norma Percy has built the story of the decade-long rifts between the West and Putin explaining how the West was wrong-footed by Putin.

Putin is well-known for his capability of measuring risk and utilizing rationality. As per Jose Manuel Barroso, President European Commission, Before Russia

invaded Ukraine, Putin's decision to invade was more emotional rather than a rational one owing to his mounting resentment against the West. Vladimir Putin has directly rocked the very foundations of the European Security Architecture.

The first episode 'My Backyard' explains the Western will to confront Russia in 2014. Initially, an agreement that was discussed for more than 5 years to curtail Russian aggression against Ukraine was faced with a blow as Russia didn't agree to sign the Agreement. Despite the efforts made by the European Union, Yanukovich didn't sign the agreement. As per David Cameron, he wasn't interested in a partnership with the European Union.

Putin's Risk Calculations: Emotions vs Rationality

There were protests in parts of Ukraine, particularly in Kyiv against Yanukovich's decision not to sign the agreement offered by the EU. Partly because the financial assistance that was the key motive behind Yanukovich's decision could have been achieved through cooperation with Putin's Russia rather than the EU in return for economic aid of 15 billion dollars from Russia. Putin seemed to be winning in the given tug-of-war.

After two months of protests, Putin got to confront the European leaders in a meeting. Putin conveyed resentment over European leaders taking part in the protests. He said, "I can only imagine how the European leaders would react if, during the crisis in Greece or Cyprus, our foreign minister came to an anti-European rally".

The protest in Ukraine turned intensified leading to the death of hundreds of Ukrainians. Amidst the mounting public pressure, Yanukovich was forced to sign a deal, giving up most of his powers. This deal, later on, was consolidated by the Ukrainian parliament. Yanukovich fled and fresh elections were called on.

The situation in Ukraine turned out to be a catalyst for Russia to work out its plan of seizure of Crimea on the pretext that amidst the growing tensions in Ukraine, the Crimean population was under threat. The US president back then, Barack Obama addressed the media by saying, "We are deeply concerned about reports of military movements from Russia into Ukraine". This statement of Obama was endorsed by his European counterparts. The first possible option for the US and Western powers was to impose sanctions rather than opting for military action. David Cameron had said, "We want to send Russia a very clear message that what has happened is unacceptable"

Many European countries, primarily, Germany and Italy were faced with two problems. Firstly, its heavy reliance on Russia in terms of energy, and secondly, its massive exports to Russia made it cautious in dealing with Russia. The overall reactions from Europe at that time were deemed as 'disappointing'.

A referendum was held in Crimea with Putin's backing. Around 93% of the population voted in favor of annexation of the Russian Federation. Which was widely rejected by the Western powers. Soon the

Russian forces invaded Ukraine to fight alongside the separatists. Ultimately, the separatists with Russian assistance took the city and Crimea remained under stark Russian control.

Western Responses to Putin's Aggression: From Crimea to Ukraine

David Cameron had stated "Putin, all the time

I dealt with him, you knew you were dealing with a difficult and dangerous man. He mourns the loss of the Soviet Union and wants to recover the lost Russian territories whenever he can. He is very hostile to the West and Western values".

This episode sheds light on the paradoxical nature of Putin's decision-making regarding foreign interventions. At times, Putin had a strong viewpoint regarding foreign interventions, rejecting them when the West intervened in Libya and Iraq. Along with this rejection, Putin also intervened in Iraq by supporting the Bashar--al-Assad regime in Syria against ISIS.

The Western powers decided to invade Libya amidst the Arab Spring. The biggest obstacle in their way was Russia.

After the voting held in the UN Security Council where Russia abstained from voting. The Western forces invaded Libya. Putin, who was the Prime minister of Russia during the crisis couldn't stay silent for long. He said, "It reminds me of a medieval crusade when someone called on others to go somewhere and liberate something". Upon his return back to the Kremlin as president, he supported the Assad regime fearing the vacuum that could be created in the absence of Assad during the Syrian civil war.

Vladimir Putin posed an immense threat to the European security architecture

in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine joining NATO was perceived by Russia as a direct threat to its national security. The Western leaders have been engaged in diffusing the extent of aggression through diplomatic channels as well as, by providing Ukraine with military support.

During the conflict, Putin said, "No matter who tries to stand in our way, they should know that we will respond immediately and consequences will be such as you have never faced in your entire history".

The European security architecture evolved from that of cooperation to confrontation based on the perceived threats of Russian expansion. Europe, however, was faced with an immense challenge such as the energy crisis owing to its heavy reliance on Russia for its energy. Many European countries, primarily, Germany and Italy were faced with two problems. Firstly, its heavy reliance on Russia in terms of energy, and secondly, its massive exports to Russia made it cautious in dealing with Russia.

Ukrainian President and Putin had several meetings with mediation from France and Germany but failed to reach any agreement as Putin was reluctant to give up on his larger plans of regaining the territories and preventing Ukraine from joining NATO. On part of the NATO, there was no consensus in NATO regarding Ukraine joining NATO because of the reluctance shown on the part of Germany and France who feared to antagonize Russia with the move.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Percy's Documentary Approach

This documentary series by Norma Percy provides the audience with significant information and an inside perspective

through the interviews of giant political leadership and their stories about the aforementioned events and the resultant power play between the West and Vladimir Putin's Russia.

However, the weakest point of the documentary is its failure in not providing the audience with the Russian perspective. It has immensely failed to take into account the Russian narrative by not engaging the Russian leadership. This portrays a one-sided view of the situation regarding the aforementioned events and the decade of clashes.

Russia's justification for its outrage when the most prominent European leaders took part in the protests that were pro-European is left unanswered. The counterarguments in the documentary against Russia's justification come from Western leaders who are deemed as the villains in this power play leading the audience to conclude that the image presented lacks a piece and is pretty much one-sided.

The Documentary is based on an interpretive in exploring the decade-long confrontation between the West and Putin. Norma Percy through the medium of BBC has carried out a variety of interviews featuring big players such as Boris Johnson, David Cameron, Zelensky, and François Hollande who were directly involved in the decision-making, ranging from special advisers to world leaders. This immensely adds to the credibility of her documentaries. There are many news and reports covered in the documentary – bilateral meetings, the G-20 summit, and telephonic exchange. The documentary is significant in the sense that it provides the audience with behind-the-doors images and information. The arguments and positions are based on the motivations and experiences of Western power players and policymakers regarding the challenges

they encountered while attempting to make adjustments and confront Putin in the decade-long tussle between the West and Putin.

The lack of a detailed and all-inclusive debate results in a percolated observation in the documentary. The journalistic rigor in terms of allowing the most powerful European leaders to speak out their motivations makes the documentary a

trivial and absurd gossip. There are many news and reports covered in the documentary – bilateral meetings, the G-20 summit, and telephonic exchange. The documentary is significant in the sense that it provides the audience with behind-the-doors images and information. The inclusion and exploration of small and trivial details make Percy's documentaries compelling to watch.