

Russian Officials Get Quirky Holiday Gift: a Book of Putin's One Liners

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MOSCOW — Some of Vladimir Putin's saltiest one liners have been turned into a book by his supporters who have sent a batch to the Kremlin touting it as the ideal holiday gift for patriotic Russian officials.

The tome, entitled "The Words that are changing the World," is the latest expression of admiration from fans who cast the president as the saviour of modern Russia and will join an array of Putin-themed merchandise from perfume to vodka.

"We had begun to notice that everything which Putin says comes to pass to one degree or another," Anton Volodin, author of the 400-page book, which was published by a pro-Kremlin group called Network, said in a statement.

"In this book we traced his words and confirmed that idea."

Among memorable quotes selected are Putin's threat to "rub out" Chechen militants in the "out house," his contested assertion that Crimea was always and remains an "inseparable"

part of Russia, and a bizarre brush-off of Latvia in which he told Riga it could only expect to receive "the ears of a dead donkey" from Moscow, a Russian expression for nothing.

Blunt, barrack-room language is part of Putin's stock in trade and helps him send signals to the state security elite which he, as a former intelligence agent, springs from.

Putin, in a quote too new to be included in the book, used that trademark vernacular this month to suggest Turkey's political leadership may have "decided to lick the Americans in a particular place" by shooting down a Russian warplane.

Other quotes that are included centre on Putin's patriotism.

"For me Russia is my whole life," reads one, while others disparage Western-style democracy and same sex marriage.

Nikolai Svanidze, a historian, said the new book reminded him of the Little Red Book and its quotes from Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong published in the 1960s.

"It's an Asian tradition," he told the RBK daily. "Countries with authoritarian regimes always try to publish their leader's most sparkling expressions even if those expressions are not that sparkling."

The pro-Putin group which published the book has in the past been awarded generous grants by the Kremlin. The tome should hit Russian bookstores in January priced at 800 roubles (\$11.12).

The group, Network, said on Monday it had given 1,000 limited edition copies to the Kremlin, which in turn had handed them out to officials and politicians as a present ahead of Russia's main New Year holiday.

RBK cited named officials as saying they had received the present and had been told by a top Putin aide that it should sit on their desks. The tome would help them understand the decisions underpinning Russia's domestic and foreign policy, the aide was quoted as saying.

Putin's personal rating remains above 80 percent despite a serious economic crisis thanks, say independent pollsters, to his decision to annex Crimea and launch air strikes in Syria.

With state TV devoting saturation coverage to the 63-year-old leader, he is rarely off the screen.

Aides say Putin, whose third term as president lasts until 2018, takes a dim view of the idea of a Soviet-style cult of personality around him even though his likeness is used to sell everything from fridge magnets to mobile phone covers.

Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, distanced the Kremlin from the new book. He said he had not seen it and that it was unlikely to have been a centralised Kremlin initiative but might have been prepared by another part of Putin's executive office.

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