

EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY



Long Branch beach, Sunday, May 11

SCOTT LONGFIELD

IT'S YOUR TURN

Commentary

Putin the Great?

By Sean Spurlock

Sixty-two year old Russian President Vladimir Putin leads a bristling, aggressive, militaristic, regional power. He has ties with radical Iran, sponsors Bashar al-Assad in Syria and annexed Crimea this spring.

Putin's posturing has put the entire future of Ukraine in question and Russian aggression has shown that Putin is willing to violate national sovereignty for his own interests. Where will Putin stop and who inspires him to act as he does? Putin is not leading an ideological, world dominating threat like the Soviet Union, and Putin is not a Stalin, a Lenin or like any other Soviet premier. He models his actions after a Russian hero from the distant past, one of the forerunners of their modern state, Peter the Great.

The great 17th-century Russian czar's portrait hung above Putin's desk for many years and the Peter the Great battleship currently cruises the high seas (though Putin did not name the ship). Putin and Peter are similar in their strong presentations of Russia to the world through their realpolitik foreign policies and unique cultural initiatives. Both men embodied what it meant to be Russian during their times.

Peter, who studied in Continental Europe, imposed policies that forced Russia to modernize, from building a new fleet to implementing new clothing styles to forcing all men to shave their beards. Putin has fought for the preservation of traditional moral values, which has some calling him a paleoconservative.

In his article "Is Putin One of Us?," Pat Buchanan said, "He (Putin) is seeking to redefine the "Us vs. Them" world conflict of the future as one in which conservatives, traditionalists and nationalists of all continents and countries stand up against the cultural and ideological imperialism of what he sees as a decadent west." Putin has spoken out against the West's progressive morality, as seen in gay mar-

riage, the proliferation of pornography, rampant abortion and a plethora of other liberal initiatives. He has condemned the West, and especially the United States, for sacrificing traditional values, but the world should not forget that mother Russia has some of the highest abortion rates in the world. Having identified this as a problem, Putin has been involved with government and Russian Orthodox Church pushes to tighten restrictions on abortion. Both Putin and Peter led strong cultural agendas that made waves throughout the world.

Putin was born in St. Petersburg (then called Leningrad), which was the crown jewel of Peter's reign. Peter built the city to represent the modernization of Russia, and he forged Russia into a strong European power. Both Putin and Peter played from weak hands, as Peter had to modernize a backward citizenry, economy and military, and Putin has to bandy with problems like a declining economy, high rates of crime and corruption and the ever-present issue of alcoholism. Though both men led a struggling nation, their own personal force and charisma strengthened Russia in the eyes of the world.

In a CNN interview, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations committee Sen. Robert Menendez, D-NJ, said, "I'm very concerned about Russia, especially under Putin. Putin thinks in the context of Peter the Great. Why was Peter great? Because he added more territory to the Russian empire." Putin, like Peter, is not afraid of confrontation. Peter the Great showed his foreign policy with aggression against the Swedish and Ottoman Empires in the pursuit of a warm water port. He technologically upgraded and expanded the military and used it to win The Great Northern War in 1721 (which secured his port and most of Ukraine). Similarly, Putin secured his own additional set of ports through his recent annexation of Crimea and has shown a heavy hand in conflicts with Georgia and in his support of the Syrian government. Both Peter and Putin embody the strong, brutal, hawkish leader stereotype, whose chest-pounding nationalism endears him to many of his people.

Russia draws its national identity from strength

and prowess. They revel in the empire and influence they held in the days of the Soviet Union (though not the ideology), and in military victories like defeating Hitler at Stalingrad in 1943, turning back Napoleon's armies in 1812 and defeating the Swedish army in the Battle of Poltava under Peter the Great in 1709. Peter built the jewel of St. Petersburg out of nothing to prove Russia's international greatness, like Putin's expensive Sochi Olympic Games. Russia's heritage calls for leaders like Peter and Putin, which explains their love and support in Russia.

Viewing Putin in this light will help the world understand why he will continue to exert power in Ukraine, Syria, Iran, Georgia and wherever else possible. The world does not have cause for a red scare or a domino theory of countries falling to communism, but the powers that be must be wary of Putin the Great's aggression and desire to put down democratic uprisings and protect autocratic countries like his own.

Sean Spurlock is a senior majoring in politics, philosophy and economics at The King's College in New York City.

Hitting the Trail, Then and Now

By Michele S. Byers

When New Jersey was founded 350 years ago, getting around was tough.

What New Jerseyans think of as roads today didn't exist in 1664. Most European settlements in the New World were built along rivers and bays, and waterways served as transportation routes – the watery highways of their time.

Early trails and footpaths led from boat landings to villages and from villages to outlying farms, while others were portages between water routes. Some followed old Native American paths, especially at river fords, mountain passes and along high ground in swampy areas. They were only a foot or two wide, not even roomy enough for a rider on horseback.

Over the years, as New Jersey's population grew, trails widened to allow for horses with riders or horses pulling carts and carriages. Dirt roads gave way to cobblestones which gave way to pavement – and today there's lots of it! Not only is New Jersey our most densely populated state, it likely leads the nation in roads.

But trails and paths are still vitally important to New Jersey's residents, who use them for hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding and staying in tune with nature. The Garden State's modern, extensive system of trails would have blown the minds of our early citizens!

According to a 2011 New Jersey Historic Roads Study, "Each town (in colonial times) tended to have its own network of local roads that radiated out from it to surrounding dispersed farmsteads. While connecting roads between towns were common, roads that connected several towns were not."

Today's trails, on the other hand, are very well connected. Many, like the East Coast Greenway, Patriots' Path and Delaware & Raritan Canal tow-path, traverse multiple towns in multiple counties. Some, like the Appalachian Trail, cross through many states – including New Jersey.

Trail lovers were alarmed earlier this year when

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they learned that grants for trail construction and improvements were delayed at the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). Many DEP staff had been assigned to post-Super Storm Sandy buyouts of storm-damaged homes to help families impacted by the storm, temporarily putting the trails grants program on hold.

So it was great news when the DEP just announced that the 2013 round of federal trail grants has finally gotten the green light, just in time for the summer construction season. The Christie Administration approved 39 applications totaling \$755,054 for recreational trails projects in 15 counties, plus a host of projects that cross many other county and municipal lines.

Here are some examples:

- \$24,000 to Delaware & Raritan Canal State Park for improvements to the 60-mile trail along the canal, which runs through Somerset, Hunterdon, Middlesex and Mercer counties.

- \$24,000 to the Warren County Planning Department to install a pedestrian bridge for a section of the Morris Canal Greenway. This project is an integral component of Warren County's 25-year Morris Canal Greenway Plan.

- \$24,000 to Gloucester Township to develop new trailhead facilities that will improve access to the 2.75-mile Gloucester Township Fitness Trail.

- \$18,000 to the Natural Lands Trust to prepare a Maurice River water trail guide and map for Cumberland and Salem counties, install informational signs, produce a web link as a digital reference, improve and expand hiking trails that connect to the Water Trail at NLT's Peek Preserve, and to update the Peek Preserve brochure.

- \$24,000 to the Student Conservation Association, in partnership with Liberty State Park in Jersey City, to clear an existing trail and adjacent wooded area of overgrowth and invasive species, repair the trail surface, and replant areas with native plants.

Funding for the trails grants comes from the Federal Highway Trust Fund, representing part of the gasoline tax. Since the trails program began in 1993, more than \$17 million has been awarded to state, county and local government agencies and nonprofits in New Jersey.

Now that warmer weather is upon us, it's time to get out and enjoy New Jersey's trails – and imagine walking the trails back in time 350 years earlier!

Looking for a trail near you? Check out the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference website at www.nynjtc.org/view/parks for a list of great places to hike. For an interactive map of New Jersey trails, go to www.njconservation.org/recreation.htm.

And to learn more about preserving land and natural resources in New Jersey, visit the New Jersey Conservation Foundation website at www.njconservation.org or contact me at info@njconservation.org.

Michele S. Byers is the executive director of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.



COURTESY DORN'S CLASSIC IMAGES

Two River Moment

The Cooper's Bridge over the Navesink River has long connected Middletown to Red Bank. The present-day bridge, which opened in 2000, replaced one built in 1925. This photo of the bridge shows how it appeared in 1909.