

1. You wrote about "Putin's Generation". What does it look like today, in the context of the invasion of Ukraine?

Russia's youth is very heterogeneous. My aim in the book was to show how diverse the views of the world and one's own country are, even within the "Putin generation". Overall, it can be said that never before has a generation of Russians grown up as freely and as oriented toward Europe and the U.S. as today - even if Russia is currently becoming much more authoritarian again. This freedom has done something to the young people. My impression is that the number of those who are against the war and against breaking off all contacts with Europe is particularly large in this generation. But as I said, Russia's youth is very heterogeneous, and there are also nationalists and Putin-adepts. One must also not forget: A few years ago, the regime began to control schools more ideologically again. The "Putin generation" has thus grown up between two poles, so to speak: Relative freedom (compared to the Soviet Union) and the Kremlin's increasingly authoritarian course.

2. Is there a critical mass in Russia to generate a social movement to remove Putin from power? To put it in other words: why don't the Russians revolt?

There are critical masses in Russia, there always have been, brave people. Unfortunately, their influence has always been very limited. My impression is that today significantly more Russians are shocked by the events than was the case in 2014. Is it a majority? I doubt it. Is it at all conceivable in the short term that critical citizens will exert an influence on Russian policy in the short term? There is a lack of functioning civil society levers for this. There is no longer any real opposition in parliament, and there is hardly any criticism on television. Putin is practically no longer accountable to anyone. It seems as if he makes his decisions very much alone. In this respect, Russia's political institutions also seem weaker today, less elaborate than even in Soviet times. Why aren't the Russians revolting? Part of the answer, unfortunately, is that many share Putin's basic view of the world and the West. And although dissatisfaction with developments within Russia has grown over the years, a very old reflex still works: in foreign policy conflicts, millions rally behind the leadership. In the past, the Kremlin could mobilize citizens by pointing to economic successes (until 2013). That no longer works - but mobilization with actual or perceived threats from external enemies does.

3. What about the so-called oligarchs? Can they remove Putin? Is a palace coup possible in Russia? Who can stop Vladimir Putin? Is there such a force in the Russian state - oligarchs, generals, civil society?

The term oligarchy actually means a rule of the few who have divided the power in a state among themselves. In this sense, there have been no oligarchs in Russia for a long time. Putin deprived them of their creative power years ago. Today there are billionaires who fled abroad in time. There are businessmen who have ended up in prison. And there are billionaires who have come to terms with the Kremlin in Russia - and are therefore allowed to keep their money and manage their companies. Influence on the state, power they hardly have anymore. Putin has also created a caste of "new" billionaires; Nikolai Petrov of the Carnegie Center once called them "black oligarchs. Among them are many of his confidants from old Petersburg times, who have come into astonishing wealth. However, they owe their influence and money exclusively to Vladimir Putin, and sometimes it seems as if their power of disposal over their "assets" is also limited. Sometimes it looks as if they are part of a "joint fund": Then these people move money around, for example, as Russian journalists have reconstructed in the case of Putin's interim son-in-law. The Kremlin has been waging a campaign against Russian civil society since Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012. It has been weakened. I fear the bitter truth is: only Putin himself can stop Putin. That's why I think it's important to keep all possible channels of communication open - without lapsing into appeasement politics.

2. On whom and on what does Putin rely?

The foundation of Putin's base is a feeling. It is the incredibly deep-rooted feeling in Russian society of being treated unfairly by the world. Russians feel - partly rightly, partly wrongly - that they were the losers of the Cold War. There is a widespread feeling of having been humiliated after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, one can find examples in history where Europe and the U.S. have made mistakes in dealing with Russia. But the real problem is that Vladimir Putin's propaganda machine has managed to instrumentalize this feeling - and reignite it over and over again. The Kremlin has weaponized it, so to speak.

3. How far will Putin go? What's the limit? What is the minimal concession package that he would accept to stop the aggression?

If you had asked me six months ago, I would have said: He will bluff so aggressively that the whole world will think he is serious. Vladimir Putin apparently sees it as his historic task to rebuild Russia as an empire. He made clear in an essay last year that he sees Ukrainians and Russians as "one people." He denies Ukraine the right to decide its own fate. I have therefore always assumed that he will wait with great patience for opportunities to regain control of Ukraine. However, I did not believe that he would do so with a war, the price of which would be horrendous for Russia. His goal is to unite Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. I fear that there can be no minimal consensus with him at present. Putin has now maneuvered himself into a situation from which it will be very difficult for him to get out without losing face. On the issue of Ukraine, he no longer seems pragmatic, but ideological and zealous.

4. How do you find Western world's reaction to Putin's movements? What are its weak points?

The attack on Ukraine has united the EU, the USA and NATO in a surprisingly clear way. The shock over the attack, over this epochal break, is so great that here in Germany, for example, even traditional advocates of Russia are turning away in shock. The German economy has buried Nord Stream 2. German corporations are ending their very far-reaching activities in Russia. German businessmen with close ties to Putin say they, too, think he has gone mad. Putin's attack on Ukraine has restored unity within Germany, but also within the EU and NATO.

5. What scenarios are for Ukraine?

I don't see any good scenarios. The best-case scenario is that somehow the fighting is interrupted and a status quo is established. But that is not realistic. Putin wants to realize his plan, and the Ukrainians want to defend their independence. I am not a military expert, but I wonder how long the Ukrainian armed forces will be able to resist the largest army on the continent. If the Ukrainian citizens' spirit of resistance remains unbroken, a kind of grueling partisan struggle could begin after the defeat of the armed forces. Russia would respond with a repressive regime. I fear there could then be a mass exodus. At the same time, however, repression against dissenters is also increasing within Russia itself, which could lead to a brain drain there as well. If by some miracle the wind does not change in Russia, we will have to prepare ourselves for at least a decade of confrontation. But I really hope I am wrong on this.