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## THE COOK, THE BODYGUARD, AND PUTIN

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Living in a democracy makes one provincial and limited in looking at other political systems. Our values are meant to be universal, progressive, and self-evident. Other political systems create other warning signs. We have hung parliaments, strikes, revolutions. Others have changes of bodyguards and cooks.

Tacitus, the Roman historian, gave us a map to follow. The emperor Nero (54-68AD), evil in his eyes, was advised by the stoic philosopher Seneca. The young ruler was guided by someone intellectual and reasonable. That is what we call the good phase (54-62AD).

Many in the West have considered Putin a positive force for Russia until the financial crisis of 2008 or even until the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Many think that the invasion of Ukraine has ushered a 'bad Nero phase' for



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Putin since 2022. Nero in his moment of weakness (62-68 AD) had Seneca kill himself and tried to murder his own mother multiple times among many others.

Nero's reign can indeed be divided into two phases based on who oversaw his personal security. The head of the praetorian guard was Afranius Burrus until 62 AD. He was a friend of Agrippina and Seneca, mother and advisor of Nero respectively. The next head of security was Ofonius Tigellinus who suggested to various intellectuals to commit suicide (Seneca, Petronius and others). The Russian version of this form of stoic death appears to be people falling out of windows. It is not a good versus bad phase. The tone changed with the new head of security. Basic network theory.

Nero's lover Sabina Poppea had a husband. He (Otho) was sent to become governor of Lusitania (Portugal). The connection between Nero's power and provincial governors is crucial. The rebellion against Putin of 2023 stopped as it entered the region of Tula. It is possible that the governor of Tula managed to stop Prigozhin from going forward with his plan. After the rebellion this same governor was promoted to oversee security. His name is Aleksey Dyumin. He might be Putin's designated successor.

Nero became emperor because his uncle, the emperor Claudius, ate a poisoned plate of mushrooms. It was prepared by Nero's mother, Agrippina. After the head of security, the most important person is the cook. Putin's cook was Prigozhin. He could have poisoned Putin on any occasion. He did not. He became head of a paramilitary group Wagner, which guaranteed a tremendous cash flow into Putin's personal bank accounts. The situation turned: from cook and supporter he became a rebel.



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One of the greatest roman poets wrote satires also about roman imperial power. Juvenal in his fourth satire describes a meeting of the emperor's security council to discuss how to cook a large fish for the emperor. It is a good and funny read but reveals the direct link between security and food. It is a pitiless analysis of this power structure. The enlightened philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), chose his motto from this poem (*vitam impendere vero* 'to pay his life for the truth').

Each democratic politician in the West must be careful of personal protection and what they eat. Bodyguards and cooks are important. It often leads western politicians to seek refuge in a limited mutual admiration bubble with others who have the same fear of being harmed without being understood. We don't talk about it. Their mutual admiration society is deciding our future.

In Russia today, cooks and bodyguards are central figures and the power brokers of tomorrow. These figures prove that the system which Putin is leading has been in place since 1999. It is personal power within the household. That is the Kremlin.

The only person who seems to have tried to re-evaluate Nero's 'bad phase' was Alexander Schenk von Staufenberg (in a book of 1931). His brother Claus was the leader of the conspiracy which aimed to overthrow Hitler on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1944.

Many in the west are still trying to re-evaluate Putin's policy. He often returns the compliment by insulting them. It is two different systems. In the Kremlin it is the close advisors who look after him who decide. The key is not policy but cooks and bodyguards.