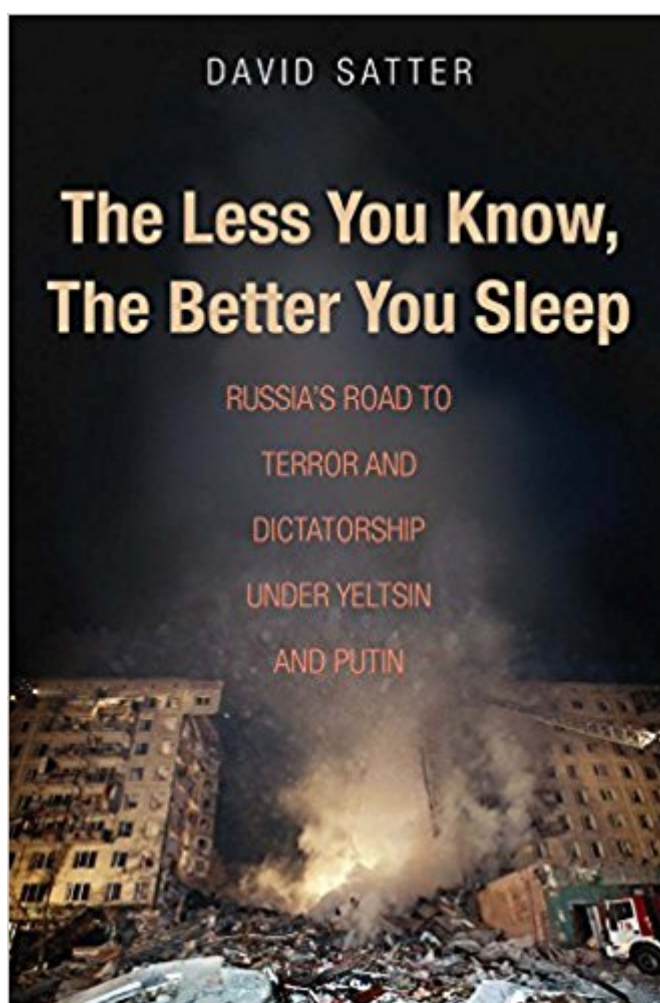


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The Less You Know, The Better You Sleep: Russia's Road To Terror And Dictatorship Under Yeltsin And Putin



Synopsis

Once you accept that the impossible is really possible, what happens in Russia makes perfect sense. In December 2013, David Satter became the first American journalist to be expelled from Russia since the Cold War. The Moscow Times said it was not surprising he was expelled, "but it was surprising it took so long." Satter is known in Russia for having written that the apartment bombings in 1999, which were blamed on Chechens and brought Putin to power, were actually carried out by the Russian FSB security police. In this book, Satter tells the story of the apartment bombings and how Boris Yeltsin presided over the criminalization of Russia, why Vladimir Putin was chosen as his successor, and how Putin has suppressed all opposition while retaining the appearance of a pluralist state. As the threat represented by Russia becomes increasingly clear, Satter's description of where Russia is and how it got there will be of vital interest to anyone concerned about the dangers facing the world today.

Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Yale University Press (May 24, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0300211422

ISBN-13: 978-0300211429

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 0.8 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars See all reviews (12 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #66,858 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Ideologies & Doctrines > Nationalism #56 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Russian & Former Soviet Union #133 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > European

Customer Reviews

"In the absence of justice," asked Augustine in *The City of God*, "what is sovereignty but organized brigandage?" Organized brigandage is a good way to describe the Russian state that has emerged under the leadership of first Boris Yeltsin and now Vladimir Putin. Indeed, without mentioning Augustine, Satter describes Russian government as "banditry in the guise of a state." The first five chapters of *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep* provide the evidentiary

basis for this claim. Chapter 1 argues that Russia's Federal Security Service "the FSB" organized the bombings of several apartment buildings in the fall of 1999 and blamed them on Chechen terrorists. This provided newly elected president Vladimir Putin justification to launch the second Russian war in Chechnya, a "patriotic" war that unified the country behind his leadership against "terrorism." Satter's case is circumstantial, but it is also strong. Chapter 2 describes the "chaos and criminality" that permeated the Russian government, economy, and society during Boris Yeltsin's tenure as president. Yeltsin had emerged as a popular reformer after the fall of the Soviet Union. The goal of his reforms was to ensure a "point of no return" for socialism. This entailed a rapid privatization of state industries and properties. Privatization sounds like a capitalist goal, but as Satter points out, "by carrying out the largest peaceful transfer of property in history without benefit of law, the reformers created the conditions for the criminalization of the whole country."

David Satter (*The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep*, Yale, \$30) has been reporting on Russia's "separate truth" for four decades, and writes that "understanding Russia is actually very easy, but one must teach oneself to do something that is very hard" "to believe the unbelievable. Westerners become confused when they approach Russia with a Western frame of reference, not realizing that Russia is a universe based on a completely different set of values." Yet Satter is not talking about spirituality versus rationalism. "It is necessary to accept," he continues, "that Russian leaders really are capable of blowing up hundreds of their people to preserve their hold on power." Indeed, *The Less You Know* is a searing, difficult to digest chronicle of tragedies (the 1999 apartment building bombings, Nord-Ost and Beslan, the wars in Chechnya, Georgia and Ukraine) full of unanswered questions and circumstantial evidence that points to nefarious involvement by "competent organs" or other instruments of the Powers That Be. One might be tempted to write the book off as the work of a conspiracy crank, were it not written by a respected journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times*, and published by a highly reputable publishing house. At the root of everything, Satter writes, is the Russian state's tendency "to treat the individual as raw material for the realization of the state's ambitions..." which in the 90s and 2000s meant "the determination to introduce capitalism without the rule of law and Russia's total criminalization." And today, he asserts, "it is the Putin regime itself that is the enemy of the population... the regime itself will use any means at its disposal to stay in power."

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