

# Why the Atlantic Council's Russia 'Post-Regime Change' Report Is a Work of Fantasy

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*There's so much to take issue with in this recent Atlantic Council report by arch Russophobe, Swedish economist and senior fellow at the Council Anders Aslund, that it's hard to know where to begin. His paper, written jointly with Russian social activist Leonid Gozman, entitled 'Russia after Putin: How to rebuild the state' is a masterpiece in western pro-regime change propaganda.*

The 'Regime is falling apart' the report asserts, 'we do not know when and how Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime will end, but there are signs that it is struggling and the end could come in the foreseeable future'. Anders Aslund is not alone of course in predicting the imminent collapse of Russia. Many 'Russia experts' are at it. Take this [piece](#) from 2016 entitled 'Lights out for the Putin Regime: The Coming Russian Collapse'. 5 years on, and Russia is still going strong.

Aslund and his colleague have skipped the difficult bit of course – explaining how the Russian state would collapse – and instead they fantasize as to how they would rebuild the country from scratch. They'd start by dismantling the FSB, of course.

As they put it: 'Normal countries do not have secret police that suppress their citizens'. Really?

Firstly, what on earth is a 'normal country'?

Secondly, has Aslund never heard of the CIA, MI5 or even the 77th brigade?

Censorship on social media is taking place all the time. What does he think MI5's remit is in the UK? We know, for example, that there have been attempts for years to [infiltrate](#) the Scottish independence movement, using agents to sow division. And what about the forces that led to the incarceration and arrest of Julian Assange? Authorities in [Sweden](#), the UK and US were all complicit in his persecution.

Each state's security apparatus plays a role in restricting its citizens, particularly if their activities are deemed a threat to national security. As such the authors are either ignorant in this regard, or are deliberately trying to obfuscate the reader.

The report repeatedly refers to the opinions of ‘ordinary Russians’ throughout, without any data to back up such statements. As an academic, Aslund should be aware of the need for evidence to support sweeping statements like the ones he makes. As a result the paper comes across more like a piece of propaganda. Take, for example, his reference to the recent vote on amendments to the Russian constitution. He states: ‘Russians describe these changes as a ‘nullification’ because they perceive the essence of these changes to be that Putin’s four previous terms as president no longer count.’

Which ‘Russians’ did Aslund talk to? He doesn’t tell us, and doesn’t quote a single survey. In reality, 78% of the Russian population voted for the constitutional amendments. Even the [BBC](#) ran with the headline at the time: ‘Putin strongly backed in controversial Russian reform vote.’ The vast majority agreed that the amendments should take place.

Aslund talks about the ‘unfortunate situation of the Russian people.’ On the contrary, Russians’ living standards have increased substantially in the last two decades. Back in [2000](#), around 29% were living in poverty, now that figure is around 13.5%. Life expectancy was reported in 2019 as [73.4 years](#) – compare that to 65 years back in 2000.

One can also compare Putin’s approval rating to that of other world leaders. One recent poll on Biden’s position rates the newly elected President at [49%](#). The UK’s Boris Johnson gets a meagre [41%](#). Putin in February 2021 was rated at 65%, and that figure is pretty consistent for the Russian leader. If the Russian people indeed felt they were hard done by they’d be unlikely to give their leader such an approval rating, surely? The report authors really need to be providing data to support their accusations that Russians themselves want regime change. So far, it looks like Anders Aslund wants it more than anyone else.

There are also somewhat sinister undertones of some of the points made. Leonid Gozman is quoted as saying ‘Russians’ apathy, which is based on a sense of hopelessness, can be turned into hate and aggression towards the authorities. This absolutely stinks of a pro-regime change strategy, an attempt to use weaknesses in the population to further a western imperialist agenda. It’s straight out of the classic regime change manual ‘from dictatorship to democracy’ by Gene Sharp which speaks of identifying the ‘Achilles’ heel’ in the country in order to engineer its collapse: ‘The general public may over time become apathetic, sceptical and even hostile to the regime’ is identified as one of the weak points.

There are many, many problems with this Atlantic Council report for anyone who has lived in, and knows Russia. Too many problems, in fact, for the length of this article. It does not reflect public opinion or take into account Russia’s cultural values which differ from those of the West. It does not reflect Russia’s unique geographical position and historical experience. On the contrary, it puts forward a western agenda, pushing western values, for a western model of what Russia should look like. Keep dreaming about your Russian regime change, Anders Aslund.

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