

The most obvious difference I noticed between Putin's presentation of himself in *First Person* and his presentation in the *Frontline* documentary is that Putin tries to make himself out to be as normal as possible, while the *Frontline* documentary is sure to emphasize all of Putin's particularities. For example, when Putin discusses his service in the KGB, he frames it as a childhood dream of his (*First Person*, Part 2, 11/14). He is also sure to distance himself from the distasteful reputation of the KGB. He does this by criticizing some of the KGB's methods such as the covert repression of protests and the disregard some of the older generation had for the rule of law (*First Person*, Part 4, 5/24). This presentation of Putin has the affect of humanizing him. It makes him appear as a normal person, who has hopes and dreams and who can become conflicted when put in difficult situations. On the other hand, the *Frontline* documentary makes sure to emphasize his connection to the KGB, making him out to be, as one interviewee put it, "the KGB man" (*Frontline*, 14:58).

The *Frontline* documentary also presents Putin as a firm, harsh leader through their presentation of events around the Chechen war. The inclusion of his statements about ruthlessly pursuing and killing Chechen rebels, even if they are found in the outhouse, make him seem like a ruthless leader (*Frontline*, 17:05). When it comes to the war in Chechnya, Putin defends his position in much more pragmatic terms. He claims that fighting and winning the war was absolutely necessary. He also portrays his role in the war as selflessly heroic because, as he says in *First Person*, he thought the war might end his political career but he was still willing to carry it out because it was for the good of Russia (*First Person*, Part 7, 19/28). Whether accurate or not, this depiction of Putin and his actions portrays him as a patriot and a national hero.

Putin's political career has also been surrounded by controversy and accusation of wrongdoing. The *Frontline* documentary does not hesitate to present these to the audience. For

example, they discuss the St-Petersburg food scandal during which millions of rubbles (The currency may be in dollars, the documentary does not specify) worth of food aid from abroad never made it to the people of St-Petersburg (Frontline, 8:30). Putin was implicated in this scandal in his role as deputy mayor of St-Petersburg and head of a council responsible for foreign economic relations. Though no investigation into the matter was ever officially completed, accusations remain.

Similarly, the suspicious Moscow bombings which were used to justify Russian military intervention in Crimea have led some people to lay accusations against the FSB. Putin, who was a KGB agent and later head of its successor, the FSB may have been involved in, or known about a theoretical plot to frame Chechen rebels. Putin's connections to the intelligence services as well as his role in leading the subsequent military operations against Chechens are once again cause for suspicion (Frontline, 21:19).

Lastly, Putin has been accused of a myriad of financial crimes and of having important connections to Russia's oligarchs. According to the *Frontline* documentary, Putin was responsible for reigning in and restructuring the system of rampant corruption in Russia (Frontline, 28:13). In doing so, he forced the oligarchs to play by his own rules and imprisoned or forced out those who refused. According to the *Frontline* documentary, this would have allowed Putin to amass a tremendous amount of wealth (Frontline, 36:08).

Putin, of course, denies all of these claims. When the interviewers for *First Person* ask Putin about the St-Petersburg food scandal, Putin proclaims his innocence (First Person, Part 6, 37/70-39/70). Putin also dismisses claims about the involvement of the FSB in the string of apartment bombings, calling the theory "totally insane" (First Person, Part 7, 25/28). The interviewers for *First Person* do not press for answers or use any evidence to challenge this

claim so all the reader gets is the official position from the Russian state. Elsewhere in the book, Putin tries to emphasize his trustworthiness when he recounts a story about how his former colleagues in the security services ask for his help getting documents signed by St-Petersburg's Mayor, Sobchak. At the time, Sobchak was Putin's boss and, according to the story, trusted Putin. By refusing to help his former colleagues, Putin proves his trustworthiness (First Person, Part 6, 9/70).

Of course, this is the complete opposite of his representation in the *Frontline* documentary, which portrays Putin as extremely corrupt. *First Person* was published in 2000, when Putin first became President, so there is no discussion about his relationship with the oligarchs. However, one could safely assume that Putin would respond to any allegations of wrongdoing the same way he responded to the ones I have just discussed: by proclaiming his innocence, or by claiming they are fabricated. If I were to speculate further, Putin may even claim he had helped Russia by breaking up the established power system left over from the Yeltsin era, which was rife with corruption. In *First Person*, Putin does take a stance against corruption (First Person, Part 4, 9/24).

Finally, the *Frontline* documentary and *First Person* differ in how they present Putin physically. Of course, *First Person* is a book and, with the exception of the few photographs included, any impression of Putin requires some interpretation by the reader. In the *Frontline* documentary, Putin is almost always portrayed alone, or at least separated from others (as in a clear position of authority), and in a professional setting. The documentary opens with Putin exiting a limousine and walking down a hallway lined with uniformed guards. Almost all photos and videos of Putin present him in a professional setting. This makes him appear more harsh, more cold. The notable exception is the inclusion of video of Putin singing from what the

*Frontline* documentary refers to as Putin's "charm offensive" targeting Western leaders (Frontline, 34:08).

Meanwhile, *First Person* presents a much more nuanced version of Putin. It discusses Putin's childhood and includes interviews with Putin's family as well as teachers and coaches from his youth. This makes Putin seem much more normal than the *Frontline* documentary.