

Letter

Letter: Putin's is only one side of the national character

3 HOURS AGO

Martin Wolf correctly states that “Russia has emerged as a pariah ruled by a gangster” ([Opinion](#), March 2).

Vladimir Putin's brutal dictatorship and paranoia over the perceived threat of Europe has roots in Russian history that go back as far as Peter the Great.

Successive governments — Tsarist, communist and authoritarian nationalists — have remained intolerant, paranoid and — not without justification—desirous of establishing a buffer to protect against invasion.

Intolerance has also marked much of the dissenting movements in Russian politics and culture; from Turgenev to Lenin to (some argue) Solzhenitsyn.

Yet, there is another tradition that has equally deep roots. It is the spontaneity and humanity expressed in the poems of Pushkin and the novels of Tolstoy and Pasternak. The voices in favour of liberalism, such as the writer Alexander Herzen and Kerensky. And then there is *Glasnost*, that brief but hopeful interlude that gave space for individual expression.

To truly end the perennial conflict between Russia and the west requires that these strains of Russia's history and character be nurtured within that great country and be supported — but not dominated — by those outside who reap the bounty of liberty and understand it to be the birthright of every person.

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