The world was stunned when Vladimir Putin invaded and seized Crimea in March 2014. In the weeks that followed, pro-Russian rebels staged uprisings in southeastern Ukraine. The United States and its Western allies immediately imposed strict sanctions on Russia and whenever possible tried to isolate it diplomatically. This sharp deterioration in East-West relations has raised basic questions about Putin’s provocative policies and the future of Russia and Ukraine. Marvin Kalb, who wrote commentaries for Edward R. Murrow before becoming CBS News’ Moscow bureau chief in the early 1960’s, and who also served as a translator and junior press officer at the US Embassy in Moscow, argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Putin did not “suddenly” decide to invade Crimea. He had been waiting for the right moment ever since disgruntled Ukrainians rose in revolt against his pro-Russian regime in Kiev’s Maidan Square. These demonstrations led Putin to conclude that Ukraine’s opposition constituted an existential threat to Russia. Imperial Gamble examines how Putin reached that conclusion by taking a critical look at the recent political history of post-Soviet Russia. It also journeys deep into Russian and Ukrainian history to explain what keeps them together and yet at the same time drives them apart.

Marvin Kalb is a nonresident senior fellow with the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, a senior adviser at the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, and a Murrow Professor Emeritus at Harvard. In his long and distinguished career, he served as the chief diplomatic correspondent for CBS and NBC, the Moscow bureau chief and the host of Meet the Press. He focuses on the impact of media on public policy and politics, and is also an expert in national security, with a focus on U.S. relations with Russia, Europe and the Middle East. His most recent book is The Road to War: Presidential Commitments Honored and Betrayed (Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

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