Corruption, the power of state and big business in Soviet and post-Soviet regimes

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Abstract
The growth of corruption after 1991 was probably unavoidable. The privatization of the state economy created favorable conditions for corruption, which did not exist before. The feudalization of a society, with its weakening of the state and the high autonomy of its office holders, was another major factor behind the outburst of corruption. However, while these “objective” factors account for a great part of corruption’s growth, the transformation of the leaders of the country to people who encouraged corruption for their own benefit—one of the major elements of feudalization—also played an extremely large role in spreading corruption inside the country. Corruption poses greater concerns to society in the long term. Russian corruption undermines labor ethics, particularly among younger generations. Russian youths firmly believe that bribes and connections are the best and perhaps only way to become successful. Widespread corruption creates a parallel, semi-feudal chain of command that competes with the official hierarchy. The weakness of law enforcement agencies, as well as the army—now almost totally demoralized—is, to a great extent, the product of corruption.

The 2500 year-old Indian manuscript Arthashastra, demanded that the king fight corruption. I dare to suppose that the author of this text would agree with the definition of corruption used by both laymen and experts: the abuse of public power for personal gain. In the contemporary world, corruption is rampant—in the democratic USA as well in more authoritarian societies—although there is a big difference in the magnitude and scope of corruption across the modern societal landscape (Lee-Chai and Bargh, 2001; Jain, 1998; Wallace-Hadrill, 1989; Wilson, 1989; Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Mauro, 1998; Banfield, 1975). The universal character of corruption ultimately lies in having a monopoly on power that provides even a modicum of control over “others” and gives the holder the ability to extract additional benefits, or “rent.” Similar to private corruption, a monopoly on a public office, short or long term, grants its holder access to public money such as extortion, nepotism, and all forms of embezzlement as well as to various extra legal services at the expense of the state (Mauro, 1998, pp. 263–279). At the same time, it would be wrong to treat as corruption any criminal actions performed by officials like falsification of records and vulgar theft of public funds. It would also be unreasonable to confound corruption with the privileges which a social system endows the members of the dominant class without direct violation of the existing law. So, the privileges which Soviet apparatchiks legally enjoyed in no way have to be treated as corruption. (Was Stalin a corrupted leader? Not at all.) It would also be wrong to violate Occam’s razor rule replacing the term “corruption” with “graft,” “kickbacks” or “extortion” and so on. The excessive extension of the term “corruption” devalues the scientific importance of the term and eliminates the border between it and several other crimes. In this article the author focuses on those forms of corruption which are produced in the process of the interaction of holders of power and those who are ready to exchange their resources for the help of officials to satisfy their interests and needs.
Only a few authors who operate with the concept of corruption recognize that corruption is, by definition, based on the monopoly of power over people who depend on the holders of power in one capacity or another. Most attempts, through ideology and ethics, to encourage people to forsake the opportunities their positions present them with to exploit their monopoly on power will fail when external control enforced by the state machine or public opinion is absent or weak. Internalized values, even in a deeply democratic society, are useful in sustaining honesty and respect for law in society, but are not enough to restrain an official from the abuse of power and to make public opinion an effective instrument for preventing corruption.

A telling example: in Soviet society, where a shortage of all consumer goods was a perennial problem, ordinary salesmen and women had the freedom to choose their customers. They could deny a good piece of veal to one buyer and sell it, for additional money, to another. Ordinary salespeople had a monopoly on goods in shortage, and could extract additional revenues, which people would have to pay in order to be allowed to purchase the goods. Soviet authorities tried many methods to combat the abuse of power by salespeople—from increasing their salary (it was a widespread idea that the low level of a salesperson’s official income drove them to violate the rules) to providing special ideological training sessions (it was supposed that an insufficient level of ethics allowed salespeople to behave in this way). However, nothing helped to mitigate the abuse of power by salespeople who enjoyed their monopoly on scarce commodities, until the introduction of free prices in 1992 eliminated the phenomenon of deficit goods.2

Among the legions of people who abuse their power, the main abusers and beneficiaries of corruption are those who hold offices in the governmental machine. In addition to receiving bribes, they have opportunities to embezzle public money and to exploit their position to receive various illegal services at the expense of the state. Holding public office as a source of illegal income is a universal phenomenon, but it is particularly significant in a society with feudal elements—one in which the state is weak, or in which the rulers delegate a part of their power to various actors. In such a society, each office has its own price paid to the government by claimants. The practice of buying an office, which can “feed” its holder (a term used in Russia in the Middle Ages), was and is widespread in any society with strong feudal elements (such as, contemporary Italy, Mexico or Russia).3

Every society is aware of the possibility of those in a favorable position abusing their power. For this reason, various systems of control are developed, aimed at preventing or, at the very least, mitigating this problem. All societies have used state structures for this purpose, while liberal societies also rely on democratic and state institutions: free elections, which can oust corrupted bureaucrats from power, and, of course, public opinion and the free media, which sees the divulgation of corruption in society as one of its main missions. As history shows, efficiency in curbing corruption primarily depends even in a democratic society, on the harshness of punishments levied upon people for acts of corruption, which depends upon the government’s determination and resources. Since a weak government is an essential part of a feudal model of society, corruption flourishes in feudal societies. In fact “the ideal corruption” is a purely feudal phenomenon because it is a form of using personal power that is not controlled by either the state or the market, for personal benefit. As will be shown later, the outburst of corruption in Russia after 1991 was a direct result of the feudalization of the post-Soviet Russian society.

At the same time, the ability of the state machine to fight corruption in a feudal society is limited because the bodies assigned to curb corruption can also be infected by corruption. This makes a hierarchy of governmental bodies that supervise each other necessary, which complicates the fight against corruption and tends to increase the size of bribes (bribes need to be larger due to an increase of supervision and the risk of being caught). The system of control over corruption, in the Soviet Union for example, was vertical as well as horizontal. There were special units at the local, regional, and national levels, for the supervision of officials inside both the state apparatus and the party apparatus. In addition, 10 million Soviet volunteers, members of “the system of people’s control,” worked as supervisors (Shlapentokh, 2001). As history tells us, not even the multi-layers of the state mechanism created for fighting corruption were able to accomplish their tasks effectively.

Attitudes toward corruption, as it developed in post-Soviet Russia, vary greatly. They are strongly affected by one’s relations with the regime (its support or its critique), as well as by one’s views on Russian culture and history. These attitudes have oscillated between the denial of big corruption in post-Soviet Russia, and Russia being declared a corrupted and criminalized country; between the belief in corruption as a typical Russian phenomenon that is practically the same size in all regimes, and the belief that corruption in Putin’s Russia is mostly a product of the Kremlin’s policy. And, of course, Russian society has been polarized between those who condemned corruption and demanded to fight it by all means, and those who either endorsed corruption or considered it a “normal phenomenon” that is useless to combat.

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1 It is terribly wrong to treat corruption as the “illegitimate reminder of the values of the marketplace (everything can be bought and sold) that in the age of capitalism increasingly, even legitimately, permeate formerly autonomous political and social spheres,” as Girling (1997) and Sakwa (2008) suggest. Even more arguable is the theory that supports an expert on Russia such as Goldman (1999), linking corruption to “resource abundance.” In fact, corruption is a phenomenon whose roots lie not in the market but in the existence of a monopoly on scarce resources, which is why it spreads in any type of society (Goldman, 1999: Okonta and Douglas, 2003).

2 A Russian TV serial (2012) about the famous Moscow supermarket, Grocery store No.1, described in detail how the shortage of food allowed its director to manipulate the highest party officials in the 1980s.

3 It is wrong to name the use of office for personal enrichment as “tax farming,” as did Galeotti (2002). In fact, the manipulation of taxes is only one means used by Russian bureaucrats, and other holders of office, for their enrichment.
1. Ignoring (or denial of) corruption

Russian liberals were the first in the country to bluntly deny the existence of the gigantic amount of corrupt activities taking place during Yeltsin’s regime, or to dismiss its existence as a nonessential element of a new society. Yegor Gaidar was a typical representative of these liberals in that he totally disregarded corruption in the post-Soviet society in his numerous publications and speeches (Gaidar, 1997, 2001a,b, 2005; Shlapentokh, 1995). Rejecting accusations that Yeltsin’s regime was reluctant to prosecute people involved in corruption, Russian liberals suggested that holding trials against such people would mean a repetition of Stalin’s show trials of the 1930s.4

The advocates of Putin’s regime continued to deny the large scope of corruption in Russia. Putin himself, until the middle of 2012, generally avoided the subject, or only talked about it briefly and superficially, without using the names of any officials involved in corruption. In his report to the State Duma on the government’s performance in 2011, he only mentioned it quickly, giving it no serious attention (Premier, 2012b). It was only during a meeting with the editors of foreign (non-Russian) newspapers on March 2, 2012—on the eve of the presidential election—that Putin agreed to discuss this problem, but downplayed the seriousness of it, equating it with corruption in America and Germany. He refused to discuss corruption at the highest echelons of power, and contended that the fight against corruption was quite effective under his watch. He, like liberals in the 1990s, asserted that harsher measures against people suspected in corruption would mean a return to Stalin’s terror.

At the same time, he tried to discredit people like Alexei Navalny, who had gained a reputation as a crusader against corruption in 2011 (Premier, 2012a).

In June 2012, speaking at the Petersburg Economic Forum, Putin suddenly made a confession to the whole country that countering corruption “is a difficult task, of which there has been a lot of talk recently.” He then asserted, as if he were speaking of a new problem for his regime: “This problem is not easy to resolve, but pretending that it does not exist is not possible either. We have to talk, search for, and make a decision” (Interfax, 2012).

Dmitry Medvedev, as president in 2008–2012, spoke about corruption much more often than his mentor, and proposed various measures to fight it. However, nothing came of his activity. Recognizing this at a meeting transmitted on Russian TV on April 26, 2012, he avowed that his anti-corruption drive was stymied because “officials do not want anyone to meddle in their affairs.” In this way he, like Putin, avoided talking about corruption; moreover, he has never even mentioned the name Alexei Navalny (Barry, 2012).

2. The endorsement of corruption by some supporters and some enemies of the regime: the cultural approach

The simplistic denial of severe and widespread corruption and of a high level of criminality in the country was not accepted by either the sophisticated advocates of the regime or by its critics. Some members of both camps attribute the robust presence of corruption to cultural forces; critics of the regime have used this explanation as a justification for why their efforts to change the situation have not worked. This approach focuses on the specific character of Russia’s culture and traditions. Timofeev (2000), a brave journalist who denounced corruption in the 60s–70s, later descended into the camp of those who saw corruption as a normal phenomenon in Russian society. Ascribing the origins of corruption to Russian traditions, some sociologists—like Lev Gudkov from Levada’s Center of Public Opinion Studies—insisted that “our whole society rests on bilateral, two-way corruption” (Gazeta, 2007). Similar to Gudkov, Petersburg sociologist Gilinsky also saw corruption as a “normal” social institution for Russian society, even as an “element of control,” that is “of great importance in the structure of society.”

It was not only liberals who played with the cultural theory of Russian corruption, using it as the main argument to substantiate both their pessimism about the future of Russia and their refusal to combat the regime. Advocates of the regime were also quick to use it, clinging to a cultural explanation of why Putin’s regime had failed in its “fight” against corruption. They suggested that post-Soviet regimes were no more corrupt than the USSR or the tsarist monarchy, and that even the totalitarian regime was unable to fight corruption (Kliamkin and Timofeev, 1999). This was the exact position held by the famous film director Stanislav Govorukhin, who, as the head of Putin’s election headquarters, asserted that “corruption is a normal phenomenon” and that it also existed in tsarist Russia (Trud, 2012). Culturologists like Govorukhin shifted the blame for corruption away from the highest echelons of power, falsely contending that the government cannot eradicate corruption from the top but that attitudes toward bribery must rather change at the grass roots level. This position aroused the anger of the real fighters of corruption like Cyrill Kabanov, the chairman of the unofficial National Anti-Corruption Committee who, in February 2012, while not denying the passivity of the population, insisted that effectively fighting corruption can only start from “the top” (Skvortsov, 2012).

It is amusing that the famous poet Joseph Brodsky was also engaged in defending corruption. The future Nobel Prize winner, still living in the Soviet Union and fresh from his exile in northern Russia, mused about his experiences in a totalitarian society in a poem. He proposed the idea of dividing rulers into two categories: “looters” and “slayers.” The poet expressed his preference for the looters, who seemed more humane than the murders and torturers from the KGB (Brodsky, 2002).

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4 This argument was used by Otto Latsis, one of the most famous Russian liberals in the 1990s in a personal conversation with me.
3. The functionalist approach—corruption is good

While many officials and oligarchs, as well as the journalists serving them, have denied the existence of immense corruption in the new, post-Soviet Russia—particularly in the highest echelons of power—some supporters of the regime have chosen, instead, to laud corruption as a necessary and useful mechanism of society. They follow the logic of the functionalist approach, which tends to suggest that almost any social phenomenon that exists performs some useful function (Smith, 2010).

Some enemies of the regime joined with their political adversaries in their appeal to recognize corruption in Russia as a positive fact. Despite being deeply pessimistic about the willingness and ability of the Kremlin to fight corruption, they, in fact, shared the same view, and tended to see big corruption as a necessary evil in a criminalized society where law is ignored. In the opinion of these liberal pessimists, corruption should be considered as the single real basis for the interaction of people who, in the climate of lawlessness, have had to solve their problems using bribery. As I will show below, most Russians gravitate to this view. In this context, people need the stability found in the rules of corruption, or in the constancy of the size of the bribes. People also need information about who can supply services and/or goods that they want.

As an explanation, the functionalist approach is not completely absurd. Indeed, the concentration of money in private hands inexorably generates corruption. As soon as big business emerges, the scope of corruption tends to increase in any type of society. Therefore, to those who believe in the superiority of a market economy with big business over a centralized economy with state property, big corruption might look like an inevitable consequence of the transition from one sort of society to another; like an element of the transaction cost for making a new type of society. Anatolii Chubais, who was the economy with state property, might look like an inevitable consequence of the transition from one sort of society to another; like an element of the transaction cost for making a new type of society. Anatolii Chubais, who was the father of criminal privatization and viewed as a corrupted politician by the people, defended corruption as a normal and useful byproduct of privatization.5

Even while recognizing corruption as a necessary cost in the transformation of Soviet society to a capitalist and more democratic post-Soviet society, it is important to find out whether this cost could be a radical obstacle to the formation of an efficient market economy in a specific society, as well as of a genuine democracy. These fundamental considerations are ignored by the advocates of the functionalist approach to Russian corruption, both in Russia and in the West.

The functionalist approach toward corruption evolved, in both the minds of experts and the general public, into the denial of corruption on a theoretical basis. If it was accepted that post-Russia was in a state of lawlessness, then the concept of corruption, along with many crimes, lost its grounds for consideration. Indeed, corruption implicitly supposes the violation of law; therefore, in a case in which the law does not exist, any action that in other societies would be defined as corruption, could not be named as such in post-Soviet Russia. Corruption is nothing but an alternative mechanism for the interaction between actors at all levels of society. In the sense that it creates its own rules and norms, a society where corruption is universal is not anarchistic, as it appears to be to outsiders. According to the popular view, feudalism has historically meant chaos in society. However, a few historians saw that France, around the year 1000, was an orderly society that was simply ruled by other laws and norms which were dominant in the country before the victory of feudalism (Duby, 1998).

Gavriil Popov, as mayor of Moscow, was enmeshed in corruption and could be considered the lead author of the positive perspective on Russian corruption. He was one of the first in Russia to contend that corruption is necessary to overcome archaic laws and promote economic growth (Kagarlitsky, 2002; Polterovich, 1998). Mikhail Khodorkovsky seconded Popov, and explained his participation in various corrupt schemes that made him fabulously rich in the late 1990s by citing the lack of laws prohibiting those criminal actions. As Khodorkovsky and many other successful oligarchs contended, economic progress would be halted without these illegal activities. Khodorkovsky’s explanation of his success in Yeltsin’s times—“finding and taking advantage of legal loopholes”—became famous (Spiegel, 2010). In addition, in 2006, Ruslan Grinberg, the director of the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, saw corruption as a way for ordinary people to act what legal means did not allow; this, he said, “diminished the social tension in society” (Moskovskii Komsomolets, 2006). Certainly, among the arguments in favor of corruption, the view that it helped to correct unfair salaries of state employees was quite as visible in post-Soviet Russia as it was in Soviet times (Vesti, 2012).

4. Corruption and the state in Russian history

Russian history provides us with a sufficient number of examples to corroborate the thesis that, in a non-democratic society, the state apparatus is the only institution able to fight against corruption, whether or not it is done effectively (Karpovich, 2008).

The authoritarian government in the prerevolutionary monarchy was far from able to eliminate corruption, which was well described in the Russian literature as one of the important elements of society (Gogol, 1836, 1842; Sukhovo-Kobylin, 1861). However, the monarchy was strong enough to contain corruption. The laws adopted by Alexander the Second were much more aggressive against corruption than those of Putin’s regime. During the reign of Alexander the Second, the government started to publish data accessible to the general public on the material well-being of officials. What is more, the monarchy did what Putin’s administration was not able to: officially categorized bribes to include money or gifts given to the wives, children, relatives, and/or acquaintances of the officials. Officials could not enter into any outside contact with people

5 “Corruption,” said Chubais, “depends very little on the authorities. It depends on the people” (Moskovskie Novosti, 2002).
who had business with the office where these officials served. Corruption hit Russia at the lowest levels of bureaucracy, whereas high officials only rarely took bribes. During the Russian–Japanese war (1905–1907), when there was an upsurge in corruption, the government drastically increased the punishment for bribery. Amazingly, the Provisional Government and its commission, despite their efforts in trying to expose the tsarist government, could not substantiate the numerous accusations that members of the tsarist government were engaged in corruption. Alexander Zviagintsev and Yuri Orlov, who studied the biographies of all 30 general attorneys of the Russian empire since 1722, found only one who was implicated in corruption (Zviagintsev and Orlov, 1996; Zviagintsev, 1997; Kirpichnikov, 1997; Zubov, 2012).

The Soviet state was much more powerful than the tsarist one, and it was able, even without democratic institutions, to curb corruption quite effectively. It is true that there was a surge of corruption during the NEP in the 1920s; this corruption was well described in Soviet literature of that time (Ilf and Petrov, 1931; Zoschenko, 1932; Platonov, 1927). However, Leon Trotsky’s prognoses about corruption bringing about the fall of the Soviet system failed. It turned out that Stalin’s regime was quite successful in curbing corruption, in which it probably reached its lowest levels in Russian history. Under Musсолini, much the same happened in Italy, which was previously known for its corruption.

With the softening of the Soviet system after Stalin’s death, corruption evidently increased, but it never hit the highest echelons of Soviet bureaucracy.6 It is true that the various chronic diseases of the Soviet system worsened in the 1970s (Shlapentokh, 2001). At this time, corruption, semi-legal and illegal activities penetrated all spheres of Soviet life (Kramer, 1997, 1999; Johnston, 2005). In Brezhnev’s era, the apparatchiks became increasingly involved in various forms of corruption. They not only ignored the interests of the state, but often made decisions that were clearly damaging to it. However, the level of corruption in the party apparatus, particularly in the Slav and Baltic republics, was quite low (if measured by the standards of post-Soviet Russia), and was kept under control by leadership. In the early 1980s, the Kremlin undertook a series of actions against corrupt officials. This was a serious anti-corruption campaign, with high bureaucrats arrested and sentenced, compared to the post-Soviet Kremlin’s refusal to prosecute officials of high rank who were evidently steeped in the most heinous activities. As problematic as corruption was, it did not threaten the Soviet state, even if its citizens regarded corruption as omnipresent and believed that corruption reached its peak during Brezhnev’s years. Soviet people in the 70s and 80s could not have imagined that the problem would only grow worse in post-Communist Russia.

Konstantin Dmitry Simis (1982), who was a lawyer in the Soviet Union before emigrating, named his book on Soviet society The Corrupt Society. In this book, he asserted that “the Soviet Union is infected from top to bottom with corruption,” a condition he attributes to the “totalitarian rule of the Communist party” (Simis, 1982).7 It is evident now, when comparing Soviet and post-Soviet societies, that Simis strongly exaggerated the scope of corruption in the USSR. However, his perception was shared by the majority of Soviet people, including the author of this article: corruption looked like it had reached its peak. How wrong we all were!

The scope of corruption in Russia changed radically after 1991. One of the most important developments in post-Soviet Russia was the outburst of feudal tendencies, which immensely diminished the willingness and ability of the government, both central and local, to fight corruption.

While corruption, according to many sources, is one of the most serious problems for Putin’s Russia (some say the gravest problem), the Russian public and experts diverge in their beliefs about the size and origins of Russian corruption. I discuss corruption in Putin’s Russia in more detail later.

The views of Russians on the character of corruption in their country vary greatly. Attitudes toward Yeltsin’s and Putin’s regimes have strongly influenced individual positions on this issue. Defenders of the post-Soviet regimes have claimed that corruption is an organic part of society and was the same in the past as it is now, and that there is no chance it will ever be eradicated.8 The critics of the current regime contend that corruption has never been as high in the country as now.

5. The eruption of corruption in post-Soviet Russia: a result of the feudalization of society

I join those analysts who consider the corruption in post-Soviet Russia to be much higher than in any period of Russian history since the emergence of the Russian state.9 There are different estimates of the size of the corruption in Russia. According to some estimates, the volume of corruption comprises no less than 20 percent of the Russian GNP (Satarov, 2002c; Novaya Gazeta, 2002). The large size of the shadow economy (up to 35–40 percent of the GNP) is also a direct result of

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6 Of course, corruption existed even in Stalin’s times. See Zara Witkin’s memoir (1991). Witkin (1991) believed that the Soviet economy was plagued by the same bureaucratic inertia, incompetence, corruption, duplicity and inefficiency that would later be regarded as newly acquired features in the post-Stalin period. See also Scott (1989).

7 Simis (1982) treated corruption very broadly. The necessity of getting parts or raw materials, always in shortage in the Soviet economy, forced managers trying to fulfill the production plans by any means—even bribing those who distributed the deficit resources in economy. However, this activity, along with bribing officials in order to diminish the production plans for a factory or a state farm, cannot be treated always as cases of corruption because “bribe givers” did not often obtain the direct benefits for themselves (see Shlapentokh, 1998).

8 A former aid to Yeltsin, Georgii Satarov became a major fighter against corruption under Putin. However, despite his conspicuous hatred of corruption, he never, in any of his numerous publications, mentioned the role played by Yeltsin and his circle in the massive expansion of corruption in the 1990s (see, for instance, Satarov’s 2001, 2002a) reflections on Yeltsin’s period).

9 Corruption in post-Soviet Russia, was addressed by Georgii Satarov and his collaborators in the project undertaken by Fund Indem from 1999 to 2012 (Satarov, 2002c). For more about the project, see a series of articles entitled “Vlasti i dengi” [Power and Money] (Novaya Gazeta, 2002). Also (Skidelsky, 2001; Satarov, 2002b; Valianskii and Kaliuzhnyi, 2002; Vorobiev, 2002; Rinaeva, 2002; Tirmaste, 2002; Nemtsov and Milov, 2010a,b; Nemtsov et al., 2011).
corruption (Zhukovsky, 2012). By the end of the 2000s, at least half of the Russian population had some experience in bribing officials. In the corruption category, Russia, according to Transparency International, was ranked the 143rd out of 180 corrupted countries (Transparency International, 2012).

6. Feudal tendencies and big money as the roots of corruption in post-Soviet Russia

The root of post-Soviet corruption mainly lies, in my opinion, not in a Russian tradition of disrespect for the law but rather in the emergence of a feudal order, which has replaced the strong authoritarian (or totalitarian) state in which feudal elements were very weak. The drastic increase of feudal elements after the collapse of the Soviet Union brought elites to power who could not, and did not wish to, preserve a strong state. Lacking the necessary resources, the new central elites were unable to create a state apparatus able to maintain order in society. For this reason, the post-Yeltsin elite had to acquiesce to the emergence of new centers of power: persons with big money and those who, even temporarily, governed regions. At the same time, the weakening of the state encouraged and led to both the mass enrichment of the elites and the immense expansion of corruption. Corruption in politics reached its highest level in 1996, on the eve of the campaign for the presidential election. The Kremlin sold stock shares in some of Russia’s most valuable state enterprises at very low prices, in exchange for loans offered by the oligarchs, and used by Yeltsin and his circle for their political and personal needs.

The powerful push toward corruption in post-Soviet society came with market expansion and the increasing role of money, although corruption functions even in a society in which the role of money is very limited. To suborn officials in primitive societies, people used material objects of all kinds as “gifts”—such was the label for bribes then. The same thing happened in the Soviet Union, where using money for bribes was relatively rare. The officials from “the South” brought boxes of cognac or fruits, and, in some cases, jewels to their superiors. The emergence of the market economy and big business increased the possibility for corruption in post-Soviet Russia enormously.

To a very great extent, the expansion of corruption in Russia was enhanced by the personalities of Yeltsin and Putin. They were both tainted by corruption themselves, and were unwilling to fight against it in their regimes. Putin’s history of corruption began when he worked as an aide to Sobchak, the mayor of Petersburg in the 1990s (Salie, 2012). The next step in Putin’s burgeoning corruptive acts came in his machinations around the association “The Lake,” in the late 1990s. Putin later embroiled himself in illegal transactions with oil companies. This alliance, in the opinion of several experts, was the origin of his considerable wealth (Latynina, 2011).

7. Corruption as a basis of Putin’s regime

With a weak state machine, and a yearning for “eternal” power and well-protected wealth, Putin could only build his society on feudal principles, with him as a “feudal monarch.” In this role, he would be well-shielded from his rivals by his own military power, by his people assigned to rule various chunks of society with full autonomy, and by promising them immunity against any attempts made to punish them for their corruption.

In fact, Yeltsin and Putin superimposed the feudal model of government on society. Yeltsin and Putin came to the feudal model organically, in the same way French kings did after the collapse of the empire of Carl the Great. They were forced to feudalize society, that is, to give great autonomy to their officials, in order to keep their power. Yeltsin’s famous slogan “take sovereignty as much as possible” was typical, as it simply reformulated the words French kings had used in their “missi,” which they sent to their vassals, encouraging them to rule their regions as they wished.

The first beneficiaries of feudalization were those who held governmental offices, which they turned into their own fiefdoms; this, in turn, allowed them to sell their services to people in exchange for money and stocks, as well as numerous other benefits like free travel, vacations, and, of course, money for election campaigns. In addition, those who paid to the office-holders and received services could be relied upon to coerce their employees to vote in a particular way. Using the economic concept of “rent-seeking activity,” this was the rent, or additional income, received by the office holders. Russians use the term “kormlenie,” or “feeding,” as each position “feeds” its holder with illegal revenues. This first “feudal” layer of “rent givers” was comprised of the top leaders and administrators at all levels—down to the chief of a small village. This layer also included the generals and high officers in the army, police and Federal security agency (Shlapentokh and Woods, 2011). The system of corruption was organized on the hierarchical principle that supposes the vassal has to share part of his or her rent with superiors.11

The other major layer of “rent receivers” included the people who, in turn, got to enjoy additional income because of the privileges which they got from the power holders: business people looking for governmental subsidies, tax privileges, price supports, tariffs, farm or import quotas, and licenses, as well as the elimination of competitors during the sale of state property. Banks were able to gain a great advantage over competitors when government officials selected them as the agent for the distribution of budget money. Corporations and people who held big fortunes also received control over their

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10 The author of this article has to confess that as the superior of graduate students from Armenia and Moldova, he too was a victim of corruption, having accepted few bottles of cognac from them.

11 Sociologists Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath preferred to talk about “the pyramidal extraction chain” (Humphrey and Sneath, 1996).
employees from office holders. The government, for instance, allowed corporations to practically eliminate free trade unions, and to make workers helpless against taking the risk of confronting their bosses.

At the same time, office holders often had to pay “rent” to a higher level of hierarchy to secure their fiefs. The holders of key positions—presidential or regional administrations, members of national and local governments, and leaders of political parties—sold, both directly and indirectly, offices in government, national and local, all the way up to members on the security council or the position of deputy premier minister, as well as membership in any of the legislative bodies. Office holders also wanted to be loyal to their superiors, guaranteeing, for instance, the desired outcome of an election. Consequently, Putin’s times saw prosperity in the bureaucracy, and a commensurate immunity of bureaucrats, that was unprecedented in Russian history.

This first stratum, whose members—either officials or business people—enjoyed the benefits of corruption, was about 5–6 million people strong in the second decade of this century. However, if their relatives were added to this number, it would grow to tens of millions of people (Surinov, 2010).

The second stratum of beneficiaries of corruption was comprised of those who held offices at the middle and low levels of bureaucracy; those who dealt with ordinary citizens who are seeking implementation of their legal rights—in court, in offices which register new apartments or issue motor licenses, and in tax bodies, among other places. This sphere also includes those who held military offices and who could release young men from conscription.

The third sphere of corruption embraces administrators of colleges and hospitals, doctors, nurses, teachers, that is, everybody who can deliver services to ordinary people. Satarov refers to the third sphere as “corruption at the bottom,” as opposed to an aggregation of the first two spheres, which is “corruption at the top” (Satarov, 2002c; Novaya Gazeta, 2002).

Corruption practice is used for more than just blackmailing citizens—for instance, by falsely accusing them of a violation of the law. Of no less importance is the use of this practice by citizens to avoid punishment for a violation of the law, such as by buying diplomas or higher grades, and for getting driving licenses without the necessary certifications.

8. RELATIVES OF OFFICIALS AS ANOTHER BULWARK OF THE REGIME: OMSK’S CASE

Innumerable data has shown how almost every member of the bureaucracy extends various privileges to close and remote relatives, including second and third cousins. In the early 2010s, in the Omsk region, Governor Leonid Polezhayev’s “clan” was comprised of all his relatives, a typical phenomenon in most Russian regions. In 2011, one of his sons, Konstantin, then a hospital director, was caught buying medical equipment fraudulently but did not suffer any consequences for his actions (Borodianskii, 2011a). In the same year, the governor’s daughter-in-law, Natelle, privatized a hospital and health resorts for herself, violating various laws. Another of the governor’s sons, Alexei, became a billionaire, using his father’s connections in the oil and gas business. Alexei’s wealth was equal to the two-year budget for the entire Omsk region. What is more, this businessman founded a company in Cyprus, which controls the water supply in Omsk. The company regularly raised the tariff for water in the region, which was prohibited by national law. This same son bought real estate in Florida, a fact which was hidden from the Omsk citizens. Polezhayev also protected his distant relatives, such as his niece and several of his spouse’s remote relatives. Some of them were members of the Omsk legislature and owners of companies located in Omsk; these individuals greatly exploited their connections with the governor. Furthermore, as the local media found out, his old friend, Valerii Kokorin, embezzled budget money the governor had given to him to build a club for business people (Borodianskii, 2011b).

9. LITTLE BENEFICIARIES OF CORRUPTION

The great “invention” of Putin’s regime was involving not only "office holders" in corruption but also millions of people with only modest positions in society.13

In the 1950s–70s, the concept of “people’s capitalism” was quite popular in the USA. The major idea of “people’s capitalism” lay in the dispersal of stockholding opportunities among the population, which was supposed to change the nature of the American economy and American society in general. This idea had many important defenders in the business community, as well as among American politicians and intellectuals. Albus (1976), a prominent engineer, published a book entitled Peoples’ Capitalism: The Economics of the Robot Revolution (1976), in which he laid out a plan to broaden capital ownership to the point where every citizen would become a capitalist with a substantial income from personal ownership of capital assets. The idea of “people’s capitalism” practically vanished from American debates on economic order in the 1980s.

Ironically, it was Putin who implemented the idea of “people’s capitalism,” albeit in a new form. He opened the door to an illegal stream of income to a considerable part of the Russian population. To grant everybody shares as promised, he gave the most ambitious people access to a powerful source of corruption.

12 The flood of big money into the Russian Duma is well documented. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of the deputies who were billionaires increased from 7 to 21 (about 5 percent of all deputies).

13 The Soviet system resorted to a similar strategy, although less successfully, when it made one-third of the adult population “little bosses” (Shlapentokh, 2001).
The members of the strata of “little bidders” were much more limited in the ways they could abuse their small powers, when compared to the members of the “feudal layer,” because they were under the strong control of their own bosses. Still, in a lawless society, these “little bidders”—teachers and professors, medical doctors and nurses, clerks who issued various official documents for people, sanitation and fire inspectors who could, at will, certify your shop as meeting standards, or not, and traffic officers, along with a host of others—could extract additional income from the ordinary people who depended on them; they could easily spoil these people’s lives if the bribes were not paid. While the illegal income of these little bidders was quite small compared to what “office holders” got, it still comprised a substantial part of the “little bidders’” budgets. Of course, the participants in “horizontal corruption,” with their modest illegal income from the bribes they received, minus the amount they had to pay out to bribe others were not as loyal to the regime as the “office holders.” Still, having adjusted well to the existing order, they were far from being active protesters.

A large, special group of participants in the corrupt activities were the hundreds of thousands of employees in private companies who received an official salary and a “gray salary” (“salary in an envelope,” in Russian vernacular), which helped the company significantly reduce their tax burden. These employees were well aware of their participation in illegal activities and did not shun it (Moyncent, 2011).

10. Corruption as a means in the political struggle

In every society, corruption is also used as a powerful weapon in political struggles. This circumstance makes the discovery of corruption difficult business because political enemies not only find the real corruption in each other’s activities but also ascribe other non-existent abuses of power to their counterparts. The role of corruption in the various political struggles throughout Soviet and post-Soviet history has varied greatly. It was a powerful factor in the political struggle that occurred in the aftermath of the civil war, with the beginning of Lenin’s New Economic Policy (NEP). The spread of corruption in the party and state apparatus was a main argument of those opposing Lenin. Dissenting voices—first within the Bolshevik ranks, and then within the Trotskyists, with their ideas about the Thermidoran degeneration of the Bolsheviks—cried about the imminent fall of the Soviet system because of spreading corruption in the party and state apparatus, bringing another view into the Soviet society of the 1920s (Trotsky, 1957).

With the emergence of Stalin’s totalitarian society, corruption completely disappeared as a factor in political struggles which does not mean the disappearance of corruption as a way of enrichment of officials, without, however, the political implications. The lack of private business and big fortunes made corruption—though not embezzlement and nepotism—almost impossible. The Kremlin ascribed dozens of absurd crimes to “the enemies of people,” such as, Grigorii Zinoviev, Nikolay Bukharin and Mikhail Tukhachevsky, but almost never accused them of corruption. During two prominent cases of the public removal of leading politicians—Lavrentii Beria in 1953 and Nikita Khruushchev in 1964—corruption was not added to the list of offenses. Mikhail Gorbachev, whose numerous enemies proclaimed him guilty of hundreds of sins, was never accused of corruptive acts. Only on the eve of Perestroika did corruption become a factor in the political struggle, which somewhat augured the corruption wars that came after 1991. The KGB and the Minister of Internal Affairs were in a hidden conflict during Brezhnev’s times. The major weapon used by Yuriy Andropov, the KGB’s chairman, against Nikolay Shchelokov, Minister of the Internal Affairs, was the corruption that reigned among people from his institution (mostly the police), including Brezhnev’s son-in-law, a deputy Minister of Internal Affairs. However, it was only after Brezhnev’s death in 1982 that Andropov, who became the country’s leader, began a real offensive against those he considered the bulwarks of corruption. At the center of Andropov’s anti-corruption campaign happened to be the director of Moscow’s Eliseev supermarket, Yurii Sokolov, who bribed a host of Moscow apparatchiks, including first party secretary Victor Grishin, who was brought close to his political end. Among the other investigations performed in the early 1980s at Andropov’s request was one that studied corruption in the firm Ocean. Public attention to “the case of city Sochi” was even greater. This case implicated the first secretary of Krasnodar, Sergei Medunov, in corruption activities. In the end, many people were fired from their positions and arrested, while mentioned above Sokolov was executed and Shchelokov committed suicide.

However, with Andropov’s death in 1984, the corruption battles were stalled and resumed only in 1986–87, even if there were attempts during Perestroika to discredit Gorbachev for his tolerance of corruption, particularly in Central Asia (a famous Uzbek cotton case) (Feofanov and Barry, 1996).

The situation changed radically after 1991. The fight against corruption came to a halt almost immediately with the implementation of economic reforms and privatization. It could hardly have been otherwise, since most of the ruling Russian politicians started to enrich themselves almost immediately, using the wild privatizations begun by the Kremlin. The members of Yeltsin’s close circle, including Anatolii Chubais, Yegor Gaidar, Victor Chernomyrdin and many others, were denounced by the media as being totally corrupt officials. The position of Yeltsin, still the charismatic leader of the country,

14 The members of so-called “Workers’ Opposition” such as Gavriil Miasnikov, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseenko, and Alexandra Kollontai were particularly active in assailing corruption among party apparatchiks.

15 Much higher than in the Slavic republics was the corruption in Central Asia and in the Caucasian republics. It flourished there in the 1970s and 1980s. The so-called “cotton case” in Uzbekistan was at the center of the media during Perestroika (Feofanov and Barry, 1996).

16 For example, by the end of the 1990s, it was admitted in Moscow that Gasprom was under the special protection of premier Minister Chernomyrdin, who was a former boss of this corporation, and who, by all accounts, had a great deal of valuable stock in this company. Furthermore, Chernomyrdin’s two sons openly worked for Gasprom.
who encouraged corruption and openly helped the members of his “family” amass wealth through various illegal methods, had influenced the moral climate in the country, as well as attitudes toward corruption of the state apparatus for many years ahead. Putin’s regime, with its mass corruption, continued the practice created by Yeltsin’s leadership.

In both Yeltsin’s and Putin’s times, the mutual accusation of corruption among business people and politicians (“the war of kompromats”) became a part of life. First, the former KGB agents and then the officials from the FSB—the heirs of the KGB—were broadly used by rival oligarchs to destroy their foes. The mutual accusations of corruption made it practically impossible for the public to separate the real from the invented facts of corruption. At the same time, the protection of an individual official involved in corruption became the highest service one official could render to another. Most analysts who discussed Yeltsin’s selection of Putin as his heir explained that it was because Yeltsin believed that Putin, the former KGB agent, would fulfill the promise not to prosecute Yeltsin and his family for corruption after his retirement. The first edict Putin issued as the new president was regarding the total immunity granted to his predecessor and his family against any accusations of violations of the law (Colton, 2008).

In any case, corruption became the main theme of the political struggle in the country under Putin. Communists and nationalists joined liberals, like Nemtsov and Milov (2010b), in charging the new regime of being deeply corrupt. Alexei Navalny emerged as a new leading figure in opposition to the governing regime in 2010–2012, most powerfully as a crusader against corruption. His slogan about the ruling party, “Russia’s unity,” being “the party of crooks and thieves” became extremely popular throughout the country (Navalny, 2012).

From 1991 forward, Yeltsin’s and Putin’s governments, as active beneficiaries of corruption themselves, did almost nothing in the fight against corruption. The Kremlin even protected officials who were arrested in the West on corruption charges. Pavel Borodin, the manager of the Kremlin’s properties in 2001, was typical in this respect. The attempt of the American and Swiss judicial systems to put him on trial for embezzlement failed because the Moscow Attorney General would not cooperate with foreign agencies (Koliandr, 2001).

Many actions against corruption undertaken by the Kremlin only imitated a real fight against it, doing nothing to stop the systematic rise of corruption in all spheres of Russian life. President Medvedev, unlike his mentor, spoke regularly about corruption during his tenure in 2008–2012, and advanced many initiatives and bills necessary to fight corruption. However, these actions were only a cover for the unwillingness of the ruling elite to change the rules of the game because the elite believed that corruption was a necessary mechanism in sustaining Putin’s regime.

Still, when it was necessary to remove Yurii Luzhkov, who was Moscow’s mayor for almost two decades, Putin’s regime resorted to accusing him of corruption—mostly for helping his wife build a “big business” by allowing her company a monopoly over the various building projects in the capital. In order to dishonor Luzhkov, who was quite popular in Moscow, the regime ordered official TV to make a special documentary movie about the mayor which, probably correctly, confirmed (as did Nemtsov and Milov (2010a) in their special book on Luzhkov’s corruption) how Luzhkov’s wife became one of the richest women in Russia. Yet, as soon as Luzhkov was removed from his position, the Kremlin forgot about the case and did not make any moves toward investigating this major corruption.

The big role of private business and universal corruption provided the authorities with a means of fighting political opposition that was practically unheard of in the Soviet past. None of those who challenged the Soviet system in the 60s–80s (the Stalin regime with its mass terror in this context is irrelevant for this discussion) were involved in any sort of private business. It would have been simply ridiculous for figures like Andrei Sakharov or Solzhenitsyn, or even minor figures in the oppositional movement in the 60s–70s, to be involved in commercial activity of any sort. The Kremlin firmly believes, and not without grounds, that it is impossible to conduct any business honestly in Russia, and that it is always possible to find breaches of the law in everybody’s professional activities, at the very least in the payment of taxes. In this way the regime focused all of their efforts—and not without success, judging by public opinion in the country—on showing that oppositional leaders were no better than the corrupted officials they wanted to remove from power. The Kremlin did not miss any opportunity to sow suspicions about the legality of the income of those who became protest leaders in 2012. In the aftermath of the mass protests in the first half of 2012, Gennadii Gudkov and his son, along with Iliia Ponomarev and Ksenia Sobchak, were described in the pro-governmental media as people who enriched themselves by illegal means (Grishin, 2012).

Here is another example of how money entered political life in Putin’s regime in a way that would have been unbelievable in Soviet times: In June 2012, Putin signed a law which said that those who participate in protests where public order is violated could face fines of 300,000 roubles ($9100)—more than the average annual salary of that time. The previous fine for similar acts was 1000 roubles. The organizers of such rallies could be fined up to 1 million roubles. “Can you figure out that in Stalin’s times the authorities fined people for the participation in demonstrations,” exclaimed a prominent liberal, Latynina (2012).

### 11. Most ordinary Russians are very tolerant of corruption

The specific character of Putin’s regime lay not only in its support by “office holders,” and the mild support of “little bribers,” but also in the Russian population’s perception of corruption. Russians accept the concept of the naïve functionalism of corruption in the country—as discussed above—and are not concerned with fighting corruption, since they think this fight is hopeless. They are concerned with having stability in the rules of corruption, and with having access to information regarding to whom they must give bribes and how much.
Indeed, the absolute majority of Russians, no less than 70–80 percent, assume that corruption embraces all spheres of social life, yet the same number of people also believe that corruption is “a normal phenomenon”: they see it as being the way it was under Yeltsin, as well as under Putin, and expect that corruption will only be greater in the future (Fond Obshchestvennost Mneniye, 2011). At the same time, many Russians are sure that corruption, when laws do not work, helps to solve many problems in everyday life, and that the struggle against corruption is hopeless (Levada Center, 2011). The majority of Russians “are not upset with corruption,” as Russian sociologists found (Fond Obshchestvennost Mneniye, 2011), and they are indifferent to movies and other materials that denounce it. It is remarkable that while critics of the regime, liberal or Communist, label corruption as a leading problem in society, the population delegates it to the bottom of their list of problems. Indeed, in a March 2011 survey with open-ended questions about the major problems of Russian society, only 8 percent named corruption, compared with 30 percent who mentioned a low standard of living, and 22 percent who mentioned unemployment (Fond Obshchestvennost Mneniye, 2011). It was not only ordinary people who dismissed corruption as the highest problem of the country; even liberals did the same.17

The case of Pavel Borodin—the corrupt official mentioned earlier, who worked as the head of Kremlin property and was very close to both Yeltsin and Putin—clearly demonstrates the attitudes of Russian liberals toward corruption. Borodin was arrested in New York in late 2000, at the request of the Swiss judiciary, for stealing money from the Russian state and laundering it in Switzerland. He was kept for a few months in a New York jail, and then fined by the Swiss court. The lack of cooperation from the Moscow office of the attorney general did not permit the Swiss court to mete out a harsher sentence. Prominent cultural figures and famous liberals—such as poet Andrei Voznesensky, theater directors Oleg Tabakov and Galina Volchek, and the famous TV journalist Alexander Liubimov, not to mention business people and officials—almost unanimously supported Borodin and refused to recognize his complicity.

It is remarkable that another famous crusader against corruption in Russia, Alexei Navalny, acting in the capacity of one of the leaders of the protest movement against the regime in 2011–2012, almost ignored corruption as a main problem of Russia, and chose to focus on the importance of an honest election in his speeches (Navalny, 2012). Indeed, among the abundance of posters at the protest meetings and demonstrations (on December 24, 2011, on March 6, 2012, and at other protest events) the number of placards about corruption were minimal (Pixanews, 2012).

12. Russians in a parallel society

Russians have been aware for a long time that they do not live in a society regulated by official laws but by the rules created by corrupted officials for their own benefits. It is a parallel system that coexists with the official system.18 Feudal barons did exactly the same thing in the remote Middle Ages, in Russia as well as in Europe.

Russians expect bureaucracy to make the rules of corruption in some way, “transparent.” For this reason, they considered the transition from the wild, anarchist corruption of 1990 to the more or less orderly corruption of the 2000s as good progress. Indeed, since emerging from near anarchy in the early 1990s, the rules of corruption among bureaucrats, business people and ordinary Russians have become more explicit and better orchestrated. During Putin’s regime, unlike the unpredictable conditions of the past, most people (61 percent) knew how much, or how little, to pay in bribes to ofﬁcials. Businesses know the cost of protection (“krysha” [roof] to use the criminal jargon that has long been accepted in the Russian vernacular). Only 2 percent of Russians who admitted to bribing someone were disappointed with the outcome (Satarov, 2002c). This balance between expectation and results has soothed the anxiety associated with corruption.

Putin’s regime could not guarantee complete stability in the rules of corruption. The weak central administration, despite the commendation of its “vertical of power” as the basis of order, could not preclude the permanent conflicts between different clans like that between the Attorney General Office and the Investigative Committees, or between the FSB and the Federal Drug Control Agency, not to mention the regular conflicts between local clans. The temporary victors in these conﬂicts could change the rate of their services to their clients. For this reason, many Russians, particularly business people, became irritated that they often did not know how to solve their problems with bribes. Moreover, the tepid attitudes of most Russians toward the protest actions in 2011–2012 could easily be ascribed to the fear that the new regime that could have replaced the current one would bring with it new masters and new rules of corruption, and that it would take a lot of time to adjust to them.

13. Conclusion

The comparison of corruption in the different Russian regimes clearly shows that the scope of corruption depends on the power of the state and size of its repressions against the people. Corruption grew systematically, from a minimal size in Stalin’s regime to a relatively big size in Khrushchev’s and, particularly, in Brezhnev’s times, reaching astronomical proportions

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17 In 2001, as an American sociologist, I tried to bring up the subject of corruption at a prestigious and very liberal institute of sociology in Petersburg. One participant politely explained to me—apparently speaking for the entire group—that the issue was of no great interest to them. “Corruption is impossible to measure,” she began. “And it is useless to study because both the people and the government are indifferent toward it. Moreover, we are all participants in corrupt activity.”

18 Examples of other parallel systems include those based on religious rules or the criminal system.
in the post-Soviet regimes. The growth of corruption after 1991 was probably unavoidable. The privatization of the state economy created favorable conditions for corruption, which did not exist before. The feudalization of a society, with its weakening of the state and the high autonomy of its office holders, was another major factor behind the outburst of corruption. However, while these “objective” factors account for a great part of corruption’s growth, the transformation of the leaders of the country to people who encouraged corruption for their own benefit—one of the major elements of feudalization—also played an extremely large role in spreading corruption inside the country. For this reason, the pluses of privatization can only partially justify corruption in the eyes of most Russian experts.

Corruption poses greater concerns to society in the long term. Russian corruption undermines labor ethics, particularly among younger generations. Russian youths firmly believe that bribes and connections are the best and perhaps only way to become successful. Widespread corruption creates a parallel, semi-feudal chain of command that competes with the official hierarchy. The weakness of law enforcement agencies, as well as the army—now almost totally demoralized—is, to a great extent, the product of corruption. The same weakness of the state apparatus was revealed by the failure of the FSB and local police forces to prevent the numerous murders of prominent people in the country. The continuing spate of murders can be attributed to a feeling of immunity among the hired guns. In the first decade of this century, law enforcement agencies failed to find the perpetrators of several dozen murders of some of the most prominent people in Russia.

Corruption eats away at the state apparatus, turning state employees into cynics who are indifferent toward the national interests of the country. They know that their current positions and prospects for promotion do not depend so much on their honesty and the professional fulfillment of their duties, but on their informal relationships, based on corruption, with their superiors and with oligarchs.

At the same time, with the continuing corruption, a state may lose its chance to combat corruption. In Putin’s Russia, it would have been difficult to find several thousand honest officials who were ready for an ascetic life and the struggle for their country’s prosperity rather than their own interests. It would also have been difficult to find the judges, police officers, and investigators needed to accomplish this mission.

The real danger of corruption was/is linked even less to the economy than to Russia’s overall efficiency and preparedness. Corruption jeopardizes the country’s ability to battle serious problems, including the threat of terrorism. An economically challenged country may react efficiently to military threats, natural and technological disasters, or the outburst of ethnic conflicts, as long as the strength of the state and the integrity of public values are intact. But in Russia’s case, the state has been wormed out by corruption and an atomized population remains indifferent to public values.

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