

# The Next Mr. Putin? The Question of Succession

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*Abstract: Vladimir Putin, the person and the president, is the wild card in Russian politics. After what could be a quarter of a century in power by 2024 (either as president or prime minister), Putin's departure could prove utterly destabilizing. Russia's principal political problem is determining who or what replaces Putin as the fulcrum of the state system in the decade ahead. This essay considers the question of whether "Putin's Russia" – a hyperpersonalized presidency supported by informal elite networks – can transform into a depersonalized system that is rooted in formal institutions with clear, predictable mechanisms to mitigate the risks of a wrenching presidential succession.*

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Since the beginning of his third presidential term in 2012, Vladimir Putin has moved to shield himself against challenges to his authority, using his presidential prerogative to sap power from bases outside the Kremlin. State institutions, like the Office of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Constitutional Court, the Russian State Duma (the lower house of parliament), and local government structures have been systematically downgraded. The presidential administration and the Russian Security Council now function simultaneously as Putin's personal staff, the core of critical decision-making, and the apparatus for overseeing affairs of state. Russian political parties have been eviscerated – their political platforms appropriated and repropagated by the Kremlin.<sup>1</sup>

The increased preponderance of power in the Kremlin has created greater risk for the Russian political system now than at any other juncture in recent history. Theoretically, at least, the Russian constitution offers a formal process to safeguard the presidency and the presidential person. If Putin suddenly dies in office, the sitting prime minister (and for-

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mer president), Dmitrii Medvedev (as of this writing), would act as temporary head of state. New elections would take place within a three-month period. However, the institutions intended to produce presidential candidates and oversee the succession process during these critical three months have been hollowed out. If Putin eventually leaves office, the Russian constitution guarantees him immunity from harm and prosecution. It cannot guarantee against extralegal actions like a coup or assassination.

Putin has the capacity to designate a successor – the “next Mr. Putin” – to maintain the personalized nature of the current Russian presidency and secure his legacy, but even this could prove a heavy lift for the system. The Russian media is dominated by news of President Putin and his exploits at home and abroad. Few political figures, either close to the Kremlin or in the nominal Russian opposition, get airtime. Only a candidate from among Putin’s close associates could gain traction at the national level. This was the case in 2008, when, as mandated by the constitution, Putin stepped aside from the presidency after serving two consecutive terms. He hand-picked Medvedev, one of his most trusted and loyal lieutenants, as his successor.

In 2008, Medvedev was Putin’s first deputy prime minister. Putin switched places with Medvedev (although taking the higher prime minister slot) to create the so-called tandem power arrangement. He prepared the ground for the tandem well in advance, beginning in 2007, by repeatedly stressing the dangers of having too much political power concentrated in the hands of one man and calling for system modernizations and modifications. Putin presented Medvedev as the representative of a new professional generation of Russian politicians – a child of the mid-1960s, rather than Putin’s early 1950s, who had em-

braced new technology with gusto. Medvedev was offered to the Russian electorate as the kinder, gentler, socially networked version of Putin, more in tune with the Russian zeitgeist of 2007 – 2008, which, against the backdrop of high and rising oil prices, was perceived as a time of domestic prosperity and political stability.<sup>2</sup>

Recreating the tandem with Medvedev, or a different protégé, remains an option for Putin at the end of his fourth presidential term. But having already done this once, is it really politically feasible or desirable to do it again? Medvedev returned to the position of prime minister in 2012. He knows what role he has to play, if and when necessary, and seems to have been kept in place as a tried and trusted “executor of the will” for emergency purposes. The circumstances of Medvedev’s departure from the presidency, however, cast doubt on his future suitability for anything more than a transitional role in a new power configuration. Since 2012, Medvedev has become a scapegoat for criticism, undercutting whatever independent popularity he gained during his tenure as president.<sup>3</sup>

Even though Putin and Medvedev had worked in lockstep since the 1990s, when they both served in the mayor’s office in St. Petersburg, the tandem was fraught with difficulty. The tandem’s dual-power mechanism created deep uncertainties about who was really in charge of what in Russian politics. Once he was head of the Russian government rather than head of state, popular dissatisfaction with the government’s performance was transferred onto Putin personally.<sup>4</sup> From 2008 to 2011, Putin’s poll ratings declined, with a notable drop in 2010 – 2011.<sup>5</sup> Rumors circulated of a potential “coup” against Putin by groups around Medvedev.<sup>6</sup> International security crises – from Russia’s 2008 war with Georgia to the 2011 Arab Spring upheavals – and the impact of the global financial and Eurozone crises on the Russian economy

changed the relatively benign environment in which the tandem had been conceived. In speeches, Putin talked of a more uncertain world and further shocks ahead. Medvedev himself spoke of the surprising turn of events in such a relatively short period of time.<sup>7</sup> In September 2011, Putin appears to have been convinced that he had to end the ambiguity of the tandem right away to forestall being ousted from the premiership. He had seen a risk to his personal position and moved to reassert his authority over the political system.<sup>8</sup>

Putin's fears were compounded by the December 2011 Duma elections. United Russia, the ruling party, failed to reach its predicted number of votes in many Russian regions. Footage of heavy-handed efforts to stack the vote in the party's favor was captured by election observers and circulated on social media, provoking street protests in Moscow and other major cities. The protests occurred against the backdrop of past crises and changes of government following electoral upsets in so-called color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan; and shortly after the toppling of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi during the Arab Spring.<sup>9</sup>

The electoral results and protests weakened Putin's authority and destabilized the system. Putin's declining ratings even raised the possibility that he could be defeated in the 2012 presidential election. Putin and those around him were convinced that the United States and the West were encouraging a "color revolution" in Russia. As it turned out, there was no Russian opposition movement or set of leaders who could organize themselves sufficiently to take advantage of the situation. Nonetheless, Putin had been dealt a blow. He took back the presidency in May 2012, but with far less of a resounding victory than he would have liked.<sup>10</sup> Diluting his personal

power by transferring the presidency had proven a mistake. Putin's succession plans still needed some work. Dmitrii Medvedev and the tandem were not yet the man and mechanism to ensure Putin's person.

In 2012, Putin had to prove he was back in charge of the presidency. He clamped down on those who had initiated and participated in the street protests and moved to emasculate Russia's already weak opposition parties. The Kremlin decapitated the leadership of the nascent opposition outside the formal political party structures, steadily harassing, marginalizing, and then picking them off with individually targeted lawsuits and court convictions.<sup>11</sup> The February 27, 2015, assassination of Boris Nemtsov – the last Russian opposition leader with national name recognition, who had a test run as Yeltsin's heir apparent in the 1990s – prohibitively decreased the odds of any authentic Russian opposition movement or party emerging to challenge Putin.<sup>12</sup>

The Kremlin pushed legal prohibitions against street protests through parliament, raised the costs for parties and their candidates to campaign in big cities, replaced the head of the Central Election Commission, and imposed constraints on election monitoring.<sup>13</sup> All of these efforts ensured that the next Duma election, on September 18, 2016, produced a low voter turnout in previous big-city trouble spots like Moscow and St. Petersburg, no significant demonstrations, and a very comfortable electoral result for United Russia. Regaining the super or constitutional majority of two-thirds of the parliament's seats, which it had lost in 2011, meant United Russia's position as the ruling party was secure once more.<sup>14</sup>

In the Russian political system, security considerations are always paramount. In addition to the fears about his own personal security, one of the determining factors for Putin's return in 2011 – 2012 was the negative shift in Russia's internal and external

security environment. The political, economic, and international conditions that shaped Putin's decision then have only deteriorated since. As a result of Russia's military interventions in Ukraine in 2014 and Syria in 2015, security elites gained considerable traction at the top of the Russian political system. The security sector is traditionally the area of greatest risk in any political setting: security elites literally call the shots and are the power base for potential coups, like the attempted putsch against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991. That episode propelled the USSR into the abyss and Boris Yeltsin into power as president of a new Russia.

In 2016, Putin moved to consolidate Russia's military and paramilitary structures and to weaken the power bases and independent authority of individual agencies by putting in place a smaller cadre at the top of the security elite who directly report to him. In April 2016, Putin issued a decree on creating the new National Guard – essentially his own personal army – appointing Viktor Zolotov, the former head of his Presidential Security Service (SBP), to lead it.<sup>15</sup> In September 2016, sources around the Kremlin floated the idea of reviving the Soviet-era KGB or Committee of State Security as a mega ministry of state security, the “MGB,” which would bring together the Federal Protective Service that houses the SBP, as well as domestic and foreign intelligence operations.<sup>16</sup>

Over the course of several months, Putin steadily installed loyalists in key positions in Russia's regions and in Moscow. In February 2016, Putin named Aleksei Dyumin, a member of his personal bodyguard, as acting governor of Tula, an important manufacturing region close to Moscow.<sup>17</sup> Dyumin's selection raised eyebrows and questions when the new governor was interviewed by Putin-sanctioned biographer and journalist Andrei Kolesnikov, who pointed out that Dyumin seemed almost

like a younger “Putin clone.”<sup>18</sup> In July 2016, Putin appointed a new head of the Russian federal customs service, four presidential envoys to federal districts, and four governors; in August, he removed a well-respected peer and Kremlin veteran, Sergei Ivanov, from his post as presidential chief of staff.

More reshuffling of top cadres came after the September 18 parliamentary elections, including transferring Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin to head the foreign intelligence service and putting close presidential political aide Vyacheslav Volodin in his place. All these appointments ensured that people in charge of important state institutions and functions would have close individual relationships with Vladimir Putin. Many of the replacements were, like Dyumin, younger figures from the security services and Putin's bodyguard corps.<sup>19</sup> Given their age and relative lack of experience, in contrast to their predecessors, they had not (yet) achieved the independent standing or built a power base to challenge him.<sup>20</sup>

Vladimir Putin already faces the challenge of how to preserve the system he has built, as do those around him. In 1999, Putin's mandate from Boris Yeltsin was to prevent a political vacuum and attempts to usurp state power, and to guarantee Yeltsin and his family immunity from prosecution. Yeltsin's team expected Putin to maintain the political and economic structures they had put in place and to continue the thrust of Russia's domestic and foreign policy. Putin has done this in his own inimitable way. At some point, someone (or something) else will have to do the same for Putin.

One commonly held view of Putin is that he is a kleptocrat whose actions are dictated by how much he and his friends and family can steal.<sup>21</sup> Putin and his immediate circle may well have enriched themselves on an impressive scale, but, as president, Putin

has taken actions, such as launching wars in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, that have had negative consequences for the personal businesses and freedoms of those around him, including his own family.<sup>22</sup> He has not immediately changed course to reverse them.<sup>23</sup> In speeches and articles throughout his tenure, Putin has also repeatedly fused the micro history of his family – especially the loss of a brother and his parents’ near-death experiences during World War II – with the macro history of the state.<sup>24</sup> These narratives, along with his momentous decision to annex Crimea in March 2014, indicate that Putin wants to leave some indelible mark on Russian history, not just a gigantic hole in its state coffers.

“Putin’s Russia” is more than just Putin the person. The Russian political system is large and complex. Power in the sense of the ability to exert traction inside the system, or to transmit ideas and lobby for benefits or changes in course, is rooted in networks of connections, not in institutions and job titles. The sheer size of these networks, however, provides a base for reconfiguring power and managing the future succession. The elites who have clout have been recruited from a network of personal relationships spanning Putin’s youth in Soviet Leningrad and his entire career. Putin has actively encouraged system renewal by bringing in not only the sons (and infrequently the daughters) of the men from his inner circle, but also members of youth movements and wings of political parties that they create, support, and mentor, and a new generation of security personnel.<sup>25</sup> Although they may not have a direct link to him, these system entrants essentially owe their positions to Putin.

“Putin’s people” or Putin loyalists are embedded throughout the Russian power complex in all the groups that bring collective weight to the political, economic, and security bargaining table. These groups include those with special skills that the sys-

tem relies on: top economists at the Central Bank and in the finance and economic ministries, intelligence operatives in the Federal Security Service, and members of the uniformed military. Putin has, for example, retained a first-rate economics team in the finance ministry and at the Central Bank, almost without any significant changes in spite of purging similarly minded people at the political level since 2012. Millions of people, not just Putin’s closest associates, are either directly vested in the current political system or see their livelihoods as dependent on it.<sup>26</sup> Although Russian polling indicates considerable dissatisfaction with the performance of the Russian government and concern about the future trajectory of the country, there is no evident demand for a different system, or, as yet, a different president.<sup>27</sup>

In any future configuration of political power, those who work within the system will want to retain their positions and opportunities for advancement. With so many people standing to lose if the system is upended, the challenge is how to formalize the informal networks to create robust power structures to carry the system beyond the next set of presidential elections, and beyond Vladimir Putin. The most logical, and low (political) cost, way of doing this is to amend and adapt existing constitutional and institutional frames for the purpose. In the Soviet period, the Communist Party took care of the business of succession and system renewal. In the earlier phases of Putin’s presidency, and during the tandem, the Kremlin paid considerable attention to political party development and consolidation. The men in the Kremlin could do so again with United Russia obtaining a constitutional majority in the September 2016 parliamentary elections.

Putin is not currently the leader of United Russia, although the party and other political movements, like the All-Russian

Peoples Front, operate in support of him.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the Soviet period, there is currently no defined collective leadership in a formal politburo or political party around the Russian president.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the Russian constitution and the Russian presidency are fused together. Each guarantees the other, standing above any other state institution, entity, or individual. Putin's relationship with the Russian people is direct and unmediated. Russia thus has a "Putin problem." The longer he is in office, the more he becomes the constitutional source of both stability and instability.

Putin and those around him need to remedy this without rupturing the constitution, given its role in underpinning the legitimacy of the presidency. In 2008, when his first two consecutive terms as president ended, Putin was careful not to insist on a parliamentary or popular referendum to remain in office. It was Dmitrii Medvedev who introduced a constitutional amendment extending each presidential term from four to six years.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Putin has a personal obsession with the idea of Russia as a "dictatorship of the law," where law is an instrument of the state that directs and constrains political and individual behavior.<sup>31</sup> The Russian constitution is the law above all laws. It was drafted by a team led by Putin and Medvedev's mentor at Leningrad University Law Faculty – and their boss as mayor of St. Petersburg – Anatolii Sobchak. The team drew on Sobchak's work on nineteenth-century Russian legal and constitutional thought. So, in this respect, the Russian president is the first Russian constitutional monarch, albeit in an elected monarchy.<sup>32</sup>

In the constitution, elections reaffirm the president's relationship with the Russian public. They serve the same functional purpose as a coronation. The Russian president is not an autocrat like the tsar with divine right to rule. Nor is the president a dictator, who can simply give orders from

above and be sure that things will get done outside the Kremlin walls. The president's legitimacy depends on proof, in both electoral results and opinion polls, that he is *genuinely* popular. After Putin's rough re-entry in 2012, the next presidential election will be an important pivot point for the system, as will the subsequent Duma elections, and the projected end of Putin's presidential terms in 2024. Putin and the ruling party will have to clear each electoral hurdle with a resounding victory and significant majority of the votes.

During his long years in office as president and prime minister, Putin's popularity has become closely tied with the idea that he is the decisive factor at all levels of Russian politics. Putin is the locus of power *and* the agent of continuity or change. Every problem, large or small, has to come to Putin's attention. This generates considerable tension around the presidency, and nervous scrutiny in the Kremlin of Russian public opinion.<sup>33</sup> If Putin is seen by the population to be ineffective or weak, if he is incapacitated in some way, and if public opinion polls indicate that the Russian people have lost their faith in Putin as president, then this changes the system's operating context.

In large part, this is a problem of Putin's own making. Early in his first presidency, Putin initiated an annual televised town hall with the Russian public, Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, to showcase his efforts to address their questions.<sup>34</sup> These have ranged from banal issues, like how to tackle inadequate social services and fix bad roads in remote rural areas, to affairs of high state and foreign policy, such as his relations with the U.S. president. Through the medium of the town halls, the Russian population watches Putin micro-manage immediate responses to personal appeals. During Putin's April 14, 2016, session, for example, officials in the city

of Omsk tweeted pictures of roads being repaired in real time after an on-air complaint about their conditions.<sup>35</sup>

By making himself the country's "fixer-in-chief," Putin has generated high and entirely unrealistic expectations that even he does not want to meet. Putin himself frequently complains that presidential decrees are not fulfilled and that he has to exert too much manual control, or direct oversight, of Russian affairs. Yet, in the Russian public's assessments, Putin's perceived ability to fix specific problems has become as important as his fitness to rule, his health and mental capacities, and his skill in juggling competing political interests. If the onus is always on Putin to get things done, who will play this role when he is gone? To survive without Putin, the society and system need to move away from these spectacles of presidential micromanagement.

Putin's placement of loyalists at all levels of the system in 2016 and his swapping out of older "lieutenants" for younger "guards" suggests that he, and others in the Kremlin who are vested in the continuation of the system, may already be thinking along these lines. Putting youthful Putin clones like Aleksei Dyumin in regions like Tula may facilitate an eventual devolution, or transfer of some of the powers now focused in the presidency. In 2008, when Putin spoke about the risks of too much power in the hands of one man, he used the tandem to divide executive authority and responsibility between two men. Putin stated that after he had switched places with Medvedev, he would take some presidential powers with him to strengthen the position of prime minister, the role of the government, and the functions of the cabinet of ministers.<sup>36</sup> In the next decade, given the sheer size of the country, Russia needs to move beyond one man, or two men, to many men (and also a few women) if it is to find a more stable configuration for executive power.

In some respects, to facilitate a system transition, Russia needs to emulate the USSR of the late Soviet period, when the state was institutionally and politically complex. Each individual Soviet republic had its own party and government structures. Their intralite politics contributed to the leadership dynamics of the central Communist Party and the politburo. The different levels and layers of political machination pluralized the Soviet system. The politburo and upper echelons of the Communist Party provided the mechanics for leadership selection, producing new people to step forward and move up the ranks. The party's cadres, traditions, and rituals, including regular congresses, ensured system continuity and renewal. In the 1980s, when Leonid Brezhnev and two successors, Yurii Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko, died in a three-year period, the party ensured they were all replaced without any ostensible conflict.

Over the next decade, the existing framework of United Russia, or movements like the All-Russian People's Front and Kremlin-sponsored youth organizations, could be drawn on to create a new structure with bureaucratic instruments to carry the system forward. This would, in essence, be a holding mechanism for powerful people, and one powerful person in particular. One potential model, which could address the many facets of the "Putin problem," might be the moderately conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan. The LDP is a pragmatically motivated power structure that serves as a frame for collective bargaining among major power-brokers to avoid ruinous factional battles. Since its creation in the 1950s, the LDP has provided a "home" for former powerful prime ministers between elections and at the end of their terms.<sup>37</sup> Russian officials have periodically shown considerable interest in the creation and structures of the LDP in bilateral meetings with Japanese counter-

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parts, and notably returned to this theme in 2016.<sup>38</sup>

The Chinese Communist Party plays a similar role to the LDP in regulating term limits and managing major changes of personnel on a ten-year rotation basis. Party rules and structures have enabled even historic, transformative leaders like Deng Xiaoping to leave the center of the political system and still wield clout over a successor or set of successors.<sup>39</sup> In China there has been no need, to date, to invent a new power arrangement like Putin did during the tandem.

Absent a formal power arrangement, choosing a successor is a risky business in a political culture like Russia's. Name a successor too early in the process and he, or his supporters, may be emboldened to accelerate your departure. Pick a weak successor and all bets are off. Imperial Russia saw its fair share of palace coups. After the 1917 Russian Revolution, Vladimir Lenin's death in January 1924 resulted in a bloody jockeying for power among his close associates that Joseph Stalin eventually won. Stalin's own death in March 1953 also created a systemic crisis. The vacuum at the center was ultimately filled by a collective leadership around Nikita Khrushchev, who was then ousted from the prime leadership spot by his colleagues in 1964. Mikhail Gorbachev was forced into "retirement" in 1991 by the combination of a coup followed, in its aftermath, by a group of other Soviet leaders, led by Boris Yeltsin, conspiring to dissolve the USSR behind his back.

The year 2024, Putin's constitutionally designated departure date, will be the one-hundredth anniversary of Lenin's death. In a country where anniversaries frequently frame contemporary events, the prospect that Putin also plans on dying in office will become the topic of commentary. Putin's predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, suffered a major heart attack on the eve of his reelection

to a final term in 1996. Putin's selection, first as prime minister, then as acting president in December 1999, was the end result of three frenetic years of cycling through deputy prime ministers and prime ministers – dubbed "Operation Successor" by the media.<sup>40</sup> Yeltsin's decision to resign while he was still physically standing was hailed as a "brilliant move."<sup>41</sup>

The ailing Yeltsin lived on for another seven years. Mikhail Gorbachev celebrated his eighty-fifth birthday in 2016, twenty-five years after resigning as the last leader of the Soviet Union. Putin may still have decades of natural life ahead of him; he will need his own "brilliant move" to ensure continued influence in Russian politics and a safe retirement. Given the number of examples of party-based power and succession mechanisms, including past Soviet and Russian precedents, shifting to a party rather than a personalized presidency for system management could be one move.

A formalized ruling party-like structure, in which Putin as Russian president becomes the titular head, could pave the way for Putin to eventually assume "president emeritus" status while retaining a leadership role. In the meantime, a more robust bureaucratic structure would groom new cadres for a range of executive positions and could provide an anchor for security elites by also drawing them into its membership. The party would coordinate elections and govern the legislative branch. In the next decade, Putin could redistribute power and pass on the presidential baton to an anointed heir, all within the frame of a party or leadership convention at an appropriate and propitious moment. The job of figuring out how to modernize the Russian political system would then be in others' hands.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The analysis of the nature of the Russian presidency and political system in this essay draws heavily on Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 2015).
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 193 – 194, 201 – 202, 216 – 217. Author notes from Valdai Discussion Club meeting with Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Russia, September 14, 2007.
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Natal'ya Vasileva, "Tens of Thousands Call for Russian PM's Dismissal," Associated Press, August 5, 2016, [http://midco.net/front\\_controller.php/news/read/category/Europe%20News/article/the\\_associated\\_press-tens\\_of\\_thousands\\_call\\_for\\_russian\\_pms\\_dismissal-ap](http://midco.net/front_controller.php/news/read/category/Europe%20News/article/the_associated_press-tens_of_thousands_call_for_russian_pms_dismissal-ap).
- <sup>4</sup> Russian pollsters frequently point out that, as president, Vladimir Putin has become inseparable from the Russian state in public opinion. Expressing a favorable view of Putin is similar to attesting patriotism and affection for the state irrespective of any deficiencies in Putin's conduct or his inner circle's. See Aleksei Levinson, "Reiting i korruptsiya: dlya bol'shinstva rossiyan president – ne chinovnik," *Vedomosti*, May 24, 2016, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/columns/2016/05/24/642141-reiting-korruptsiya>.
- <sup>5</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 230. Russia's leading independent polling agency, the Levada Center, has maintained a monthly index of Putin's approval rating since he first became president in 2000, as well as indexes on public attitudes toward the state of the country and the performance of the government. These can all be found at <http://www.levada.ru/old/indeksy>.
- <sup>6</sup> See Tom Parfitt's January 2012 interview with Gleb Pavlovsky for *The Guardian*, published in full as Gleb Pavlovsky, "Putin's World Outlook," *New Left Review* 88 (July/August 2014), <https://newleftreview.org/II/88/gleb-pavlovsky-putin-s-world-outlook>.
- <sup>7</sup> Comments made by Dmitrii Medvedev to author and small group on the side of a formal presentation at the Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., April 13, 2010.
- <sup>8</sup> Will Englund and Kathy Lally, "Medvedev Confirms He Will Step Aside for Putin to Return to Russia's Presidency," *The Washington Post*, September 24, 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/dmitry-medvedev-asks-putin-to-run-for-president-of-russia/2011/09/24/gIQAXGwpsK\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/dmitry-medvedev-asks-putin-to-run-for-president-of-russia/2011/09/24/gIQAXGwpsK_story.html). The timing of Putin's decision was linked to the schedule for the December 2011 parliamentary elections.
- <sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these developments see Pavlovsky, "Putin's World Outlook"; and Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 227 – 259. Putin expressed an extremely negative reaction to Muammar Gaddafi's death, in Libya in October 2011, just a few weeks later at the November 11, 2011, session of the Valdai Discussion Club meeting (from author notes).
- <sup>10</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 231 – 232.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 249 – 251.
- <sup>12</sup> See Sergei Aleksashenko, "Period poluraspada: god posle ubiistva Borisa Nemtsova," *Forbes.ru*, February 26, 2016, <http://www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/vertikal/313657-period-poluraspada-god-posle-ubiistva-borisa-nemtsova>.
- <sup>13</sup> Kathrin Hille, "Russia: How to Exercise Political Control," *Financial Times*, September 7, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/94c679fc-7418-11e6-b60a-de4532d5ea35>.
- <sup>14</sup> Matthew Bodner and Mikhail Fishman, "Elections 2016: An Overwhelming Victory for the Kremlin: The Ruling United Russia Party Dominates the 2016 State Duma Elections," *The Moscow Times*, September 19, 2016, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/duma-election-wrap-up-55383>.
- <sup>15</sup> Roger McDermott, "Countering Color Revolution Drives Russia's Creation of National Guard," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13 (71) (April 12, 2016).

- <sup>16</sup> See Timofey Timofeychev, "Russia to Resurrect Soviet-Era Ministry of State Security," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, September 20, 2016, [http://rbth.com/politics\\_and\\_society/2016/09/20/russia-to-resurrect-soviet-era-ministry-of-state-security\\_631663](http://rbth.com/politics_and_society/2016/09/20/russia-to-resurrect-soviet-era-ministry-of-state-security_631663). See also Pavel Baev, "Younger Crowd Will Not Rejuvenate Putin's Court," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13 (158) (October 3, 2016), <https://jamestown.org/program/younger-crowd-will-not-rejuvenate-putins-court/>.
- <sup>17</sup> Andrei Kolesnikov, "'V kontse kontsov, zhizn' ne raz kruto menyalas': Aleksei Dyumin rasskazal 'B,' kak on doshel do Tuly," *Kommersant*, February 9, 2016, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2911780>.
- <sup>18</sup> Kolesnikov, along with two other journalists, Nataliya Gevorkyan and Natal'ya Timakova, produced Putin's first presidential campaign biography. See Nataliya Gevorkyan, Natal'ya Timakova, and Andrei Kolesnikov, *Ot pervogo litsa: razgovory s Vladimirom Putinom* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000).
- <sup>19</sup> Daria Litvinova, "Putin's Game of Thrones: The Men in Epaulets Take Over," *The Moscow Times*, July 29, 2016, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/game-of-thrones-russian-regions-and-districts-get-new-leaders-in-epaulets-54782>; Tom Balmforth, "Putin Reshuffles Regional Leaders Ahead of Vote: Russian Customs Chief Out," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 28, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-putin-reshuffle-balyaninov-zurabov/27886343.html>; and Andrew Monaghan, "Putin's Removal of Ivanov as Chief of Staff is More About Rejuvenation," Chatham House Expert Comment, August 15, 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/putins-removal-ivanov-chief-staff-more-about-rejuvenation>.
- <sup>20</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Putin's Incredible Shrinking Circle," European Council on Foreign Relations Commentary, August 17, 2016, [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_putins\\_incredible\\_shrinking\\_circle\\_7099](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_incredible_shrinking_circle_7099); Andrei Kolesnikov, "Out With the Old, In With the New for Russia's Political Elite," *Moscow Times*, August 25, 2016, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/out-with-the-old-in-with-the-new-for-russias-political-elite-55110>; and Mike Eckel, "Putin Taps Duma Speaker as New Foreign Spy Boss in Latest Kremlin Shakeup," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 22, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-putin-naryshkin-svr/28007297.html>.
- <sup>21</sup> See Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2014).
- <sup>22</sup> After Russian-backed rebel forces shot down Malaysian airlines flight MH17, flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur over Ukraine on July 17, 2014, it was revealed that Putin's oldest daughter and her Dutch husband had a residence in The Hague. Reports suggested that the couple were subsequently forced to relocate to Moscow. Similarly, members of Putin's inner circle were hit with personal sanctions and visa bans by the United States and European Union after the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in eastern Ukraine. See, for example, Philip Oltermann and Shaun Walker, "MH17: Dutch Mayor Wants Vladimir Putin's Daughter Maria Deported," *The Guardian*, July 23, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/23/mh17-dutch-mayor-vladimir-putin-daughter-deport>; and Stefan Wagstyl, "U.S. Targets Vladimir Putin's Inner Circle: EU Takes New Steps to Punish Russia," *Financial Times*, March 21 2014, <https://next.ft.com/content/635bf2b4-b013-11e3-b0d0-00144feab7de>.
- <sup>23</sup> Author's private discussion with former senior U.S. Treasury and White House official on the U.S. government's expectations that Putin might reverse course in Ukraine after the imposition of sanctions on his associates, April 13, 2016.
- <sup>24</sup> Fiona Hill, "Putin kämpft den Krieg seines Vaters," *Die Zeit*, May 6, 2015, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-05/gedenken-zweiter-weltkrieg-wladimir-putin-tag-des-sieges>.
- <sup>25</sup> See Julie Hemment, *Youth Politics in Putin's Russia: Producing Patriots and Entrepreneurs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); and Andrew Monaghan, *The New Politics of Russia: Interpreting Change* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2016).
- <sup>26</sup> A July 2015 report, produced by the Russian Academy of Economics and State Service, concluded that the bulk of the Russian middle class was now primarily composed of state bureaucrats and employees of the Russian security services. See "Srednim klassom v Rossii stanovyatsya siloviki i chinovniki," *Ekho Rossii*, August 4, 2016, <http://ehorussia.com/new/node/12724>.

- <sup>27</sup> Andrei Kolesnikov, *Russian Ideology after Crimea* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2015), <http://carnegie.ru/2015/09/22/russian-ideology-after-crimea/ihzq>. See also presentation by Kirill Rogov, “The Authoritarian Bias: Measuring Public Opinion in Russia,” Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., April 20, 2016, [http://www.globalinterests.org/2016/04/19/the-authoritarian-bias-measuring-public-opinion-in-russia/?mc\\_cid=f699005c47&mc\\_eid=d22f87d69d](http://www.globalinterests.org/2016/04/19/the-authoritarian-bias-measuring-public-opinion-in-russia/?mc_cid=f699005c47&mc_eid=d22f87d69d); and Leon Aron, ed., *Putin’s Russia: How it Rose, How it is Maintained, and How it Might End* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2015). Fiona Hill
- <sup>28</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 68, 231.
- <sup>29</sup> In late September 2016, several Russian commentators discussed rumors that the Kremlin was considering the establishment of a “state council” to create a more “collegial administration” to shepherd the presidential succession. See, for example, Paul Goble, “A State Council Would Be a New Politburo Designed to Make Succession Easier, Solovey Says,” Window on Eurasia Blog, September 26, 2016, <http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2016/09/a-state-council-would-be-new-politburo.html>. But as another prominent Russian commentator noted shortly afterward, at an off-the-record meeting at the Brookings Institution on October 3, 2016: “This is the job of some people in the Kremlin to spread rumors to see how they are received.” Other similar rumors at this juncture included the possibility that the Kremlin would bring forward the presidential election from 2018 to 2017 to take advantage of the postelection “boost” to United Russia from the September 18, 2016, parliamentary election.
- <sup>30</sup> Philip P. Pan, “Russia’s Medvedev Signs Constitutional Amendment to Lengthen Presidential Terms,” *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/30/AR2008123000839.html>.
- <sup>31</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 51–53.
- <sup>32</sup> The only foreign reference point the constitutional scholars considered, in the words of one member of the Sobchak team, Sergei Shakhrai, was the “British Queen.” See *ibid.*, 196. For a broader discussion of Sobchak’s role and the legal theory underpinning the constitution, see *ibid.*, 51–55.
- <sup>33</sup> For a detailed discussion of this issue and how the Russian political system functions, see *ibid.*, 190–224.
- <sup>34</sup> Literally millions of questions are solicited and fielded by an advance team, months ahead of the Direct Line. *Ibid.*, 173–174.
- <sup>35</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “Vladimir Putin’s Vulnerable Side is at Fore in Call-In Show,” *The New York Times*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/15/world/europe/vladimir-putin-russia.html>; and Lucian Kim, “Vladimir Putin Feels Your Pain: The Surreal Spectacle of the Russian President’s Annual Call-In Show,” *Slate*, April 14, 2016, [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/foreigners/2016/04/vladimir\\_putin\\_promises\\_to\\_fix\\_potholes\\_in\\_annual\\_live\\_call\\_in\\_show.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2016/04/vladimir_putin_promises_to_fix_potholes_in_annual_live_call_in_show.html). See also Vladimir Putin, “Otvety na voprosy zhuranlistov po itogam ‘Pryamoi linii,’” April 14, 2016, <http://special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51718>. The transcript for the full event is on the Kremlin’s official presidential website at <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51716>.
- <sup>36</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, 216–217. Author notes from Valdai Discussion Club meeting with Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Russia, September 14, 2007.
- <sup>37</sup> The LDP’s website provides a fairly detailed history of the establishment and goals of the party; see <https://www.jimin.jp/english/index.html>.
- <sup>38</sup> Author notes from interview with the Deputy Director General of the European Affairs Bureau at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Washington, D.C., June 30, 2016.
- <sup>39</sup> See Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).
- <sup>40</sup> Ben Judah, *Fragile Empire: How Russia Fell In and Out of Love with Vladimir Putin* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 26–28.

<sup>41</sup> Celestine Bohlen, "Yeltsin Resigns: The Overview; Yeltsin Resigns, Naming Putin as Acting President to Run in March Election," *The New York Times*, January 1, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/01/world/yeltsin-resigns-overview-yeltsin-resigns-naming-putin-acting-president-run-march.html?pagewanted=all>.