

# The Future of Russian Democracy

Spring

# 2012

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## **Abstract**

Vladimir Putin's victory in the 2012 presidential race, following months of rising expectations among politicians and activists for the growth of Russia's weak opposition since their gains in the last parliamentary elections, necessitated this examination of Russia's changing political landscape and major trends in the administration and opposition. The study predicts the decisions of key political figures in Russia over Putin's six year term in order to identify how they will influence the development of Russian democracy.

This analysis is based in the ongoing debate about the definition and design of Russia's unique democracy, most notably the authoritarian "sovereign democracy," promoted by Putin. It examines Russian politics in light of four scenarios proposed by experts, which categorized alternatives for Russian political evolution by 2020 and help identify how policymakers' actions will influence Russian democracy.

The paper identifies and describes the histories, ideologies, and public influence wielded by each of the official candidates in the 2012 presidential election. These profiles are then used to analyze how the administration, the official opposition, and the unofficial opposition, will react to the three most important areas of future political development: parliamentary party restructuring; the Russian middle class as a political force; and the relationship between Russia and the West.

The analysis concludes that although Putin's authoritarian control over politics will continue, this will be his last term as president. The official opposition will grow dramatically as new parties are formed, though it will take a new generation of popular and innovative leaders to keep the Duma's new pluralism from becoming unwieldy. Properly organized, the new

parliamentary opposition will encourage Russians to support democratic reform and offer viable alternatives to Putin's successor by 2018. Finally, through the victories of young reformers in small council races and independent candidates in mayoral races, the hands-on experience of Russian citizens with functional democratic institutions will increase the demand for open democracy. Russia will move slowly towards greater political freedom over the next six years, and the quality of their experience with this evolving system on both a local and national level will determine if, by 2018, the country will embrace a truly democratizing president, or choose to continue to exist halfway between authoritarianism and open, responsive democracy under "sovereign democracy," and Putin's successor.

### **Literature Review**

An examination of Russia's future political course must begin with the seminal argument of Francis Fukuyama's 1989 article *The End of History*. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama boldly declared that the twentieth century had resulted in "an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism." In his view, "the end of history" was not the end of civilization, but rather the ultimate point in humanity's ideological evolution, following which he predicted that Western-style liberal democracy would evolve and spread globally. In his view that ideology, although the not globally adopted, achieved a victory "in the realm of ideas"<sup>12</sup> over other, once legitimate political schools like fascism and communism. At the end of the twentieth century, he says, only capitalism and liberal democracy were still seen as possible avenues of ideological development - a fact that is epitomized in the transformation of

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History?* Summer, 1989. *The National Interest*. via WesJones.com. <<http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. *Reflections on the End of History, Five Years Later*. 1994. *History and Theory*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Theme Issue 34: World Historians and Their Critics. May 1995. pp. 27-43. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505433>>.

the socialist USSR into the capitalist Russian Federation. Fukuyama's argument spawned two decades of academic debate about the future and on whether democracy is truly the endpoint of political thought. However new theories, like postmodernism, arose that challenged his assertions and sought to prove the existence of future political development. A thorough examination of these arguments is essential to the examination of how Russian politics will evolve over the next six years, and in determining desirable potential paths.

The debate over how to classify the Russian approach to democracy illuminates the risks and advantages of Putin's super-presidentialism, and how the relationship between citizens and officials has evolved since Fukuyama proclaimed the victory of Western ideology. Many scholars have offered definitions and titles for the modern Russian state; the most discussed of which is "sovereign democracy," the title used by Kremlin officials and supporters to describe and defend the authoritarian nature of Russian democracy. The most salient discussion of the accuracy and desirability of sovereign democracy to date was at a 2008 meeting of the Academic Council of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IFRAS).

The debate began with a speech by Vladimir Iu. Surkov, the first deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration and aide to the Russian president, who argued that Russia had rejected Western liberal democratic evolution, asserting that there is a Russian political ideology substantially different from liberal democracy. The existence and growth of a distinctly Russian ideology would seem to contradict Fukuyama.

"The design of the latest social models is clearly aimed at the softening of political regimes, at growth in the role of intellectual superiority and information exchange, at the enmeshing of power hierarchies within self-regulating networks - in short, at democracy<sup>3</sup>,"

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<sup>3</sup> Surkov, V. Iu. *Nationalization of the Future: Paragraphs pro Sovereign Democracy*. 2009. Russian Studies in Philosophy, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 8-21. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

Surkov said. The "social models" he was referring to are international institutions and foreign countries who criticize what he considers internal issues (e.g. press freedoms). Calling Russia's adoption of democracy in the early 1990s "political carelessness," resulting from the ineffective governance of the socialist institutions of the USSR, he attempts to call into question the nation's initial bumpy lurch towards democracy. Yet, he says that he believes democracy is working, for now, and expresses hope that it will lead to greater freedom for Russians<sup>4</sup>. The argument behind sovereign democracy, as expressed by this close ally of President Putin, seeks to but does not successfully defend the state's internationally unpopular authoritarianism by attacking the idea that Western democracies have found the one proper path for democratic transformation. Though he strongly argues that Russian democracy has its own character, he does not sufficiently prove that the unpopular components of sovereign democracy are necessary or even temporarily desirable.

Though Surkov, who manages, crafts, and promotes Putin and Medvedev's ideology,<sup>5</sup> provides an exemplary definition of the Kremlin's perspective on Russian democracy, the panel of political scholars and philosophers found ample room to criticize the lack of substance in his argument. Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Dr. T.I. Oizerman called Surkov's statement little better than "a systemic collection of certain theses," and, "a sort of ideological platform," rather than a legitimate defense of the current state of Russian democracy<sup>6</sup>.

Boris Mezhuev, a philosophy and political science historian and senior lecturer at Moscow State University, argued that sovereign democracy is an empty term, saying it would be impossible to define a non-sovereign democracy, and that it is a hollow justification for current

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Bykova, Marina F. *Editor's Introduction*. 2009. *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 3-7. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> Oizerman, T.I. *On the Russian Nation and Science as the Chief Productive Force*. 2009. *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 22-25. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

Kremlin policies. He categorically rejected the idea that Russia does not and should not play "by common rules." "Just as it is senseless to speak of sovereign mathematics, so it is senseless to speak of a sovereign system of law that rejects the norms and rules of conduct and home and abroad that are binding on any democratic state," he argued.<sup>7</sup> In his response to Surkov, Mezhuev successfully called into doubt the usability of sovereign democracy to define the Russian state.

Professor N.V. Motroshilova argued that there was more substance to the term than Mezhuev had claimed. "Many painful problems have their origin in an actual split between the principles of sovereignty and democracy," she said, "It is hardly possible to deny that this split underlies fundamental problems of the contemporary world." Motroshilova points out that the realm of international politics is not as simple as Mezhuev described. While offering some legitimacy to a portion of Surkov's argument, she highlights that Surkov's ideology does not sufficiently elaborate on "civilizational aspects of Democracy," which effect citizens' willingness to embrace democratic institutions.

Motroshilova argued that the "central question," concerning the "ailments of contemporary democracy," is, "behind the democratic façade of government, are individuals *from the broadest strata of the people* really able to uphold their *basic rights and freedoms*, their human dignity in the *real process of life*?" In order to counter the growing distrust of democracy, which she said is largely due to the perception that democracy is a "screen...to conceal a handful of fabulously rich people who run the contemporary world," citizens in emerging democracies must have politicians that improve the real processes of daily life through democratic institutions. These issues, from medical care to public safety to road quality, will

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<sup>7</sup> Mezhuev, V.M. *I Would Prefer to Speak of Democratic Sovereignty*. 2009. Russian Studies in Philosophy, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 26-32. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

have a significant effect on the voting behavior and political preferences of Russia's rising middle class, which will play an increasingly important role in Russian politics.

She concludes that "the whole democratic world must set aside the existing forms and procedures of democracy and think up new ones that will rely on civilizational mechanisms and block the mechanisms that are reducing democracy to barbarism." Those destructive mechanisms, such as evaluating national projects by the amount of money spent or the amount of product created, are holdovers from the past that must be replaced with policies that create tangible benefits for citizens<sup>8</sup>. She argues effectively that this "crisis of democracy" is the reason that Russia cannot use sovereignty as an excuse for insularity, though a uniquely Russian path is possible and legitimate.

The most powerful and logical response to Surkov was given by noted scholar I.K. Pantin, who clearly identified the most significant problems with sovereign democracy. He agrees with Surkov and Motroshilova that Russian democracy must be "something more than a simple borrowing of the political experience of Western nations." He argues, however, that unless Surkov was seeking to describe a project for the future development of Russian democracy, sovereign democracy cannot be categorized along with other classifications of democracy (e.g. liberal, social, delegative). "Inasmuch as the project of 'sovereign democracy' aims to interpret the specific characteristics of Russian democracy, it creates a theoretical construct capable, alongside others, of guiding research to reveal possible paths of democratic development," he said. His discussion thus does not summarily discount Surkov's presentation as ideology, but elucidates its strengths and weaknesses eloquently. Though the theory is imperfect, he says, it appropriately distinguishes the Russian path to democracy from that of

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<sup>8</sup> Motroshilova, N.V. *We Need to Elaborate More Boldly the Civilizational Aspects of Democracy*. 2009. Russian Studies in Philosophy, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 33-44. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.



European nations, whose own troubled paths to democracy evolved over a much longer time. Its biggest flaw is that the true meaning of sovereign democracy seems to originate in the ideology of a given nation's leadership; France, Great Britain, and the United States could all legitimately be called sovereign democracies, yet do not reject international institutions like the UN as Surkov suggested a sovereign democracy must. There is nothing in the term and theory that defines, beyond mere existence, the specific sovereign character of Russian governance.<sup>9</sup>

The argument surrounding sovereign democracy sheds an important light on Kremlin ideology, both in why it resonates with many Russians and in the problems such an outlook creates. Primarily due to the reasons cited above, however, it is not useful as the sole categorization of modern Russian government, nor as the inevitable path of post-Soviet democracy. Though agreeing with many assertions of the IFRAS presenters on the overall state of Russian politics, other scholars have posited alternative categorizations of Russian democracy that further elucidate the topic.

One of the most popular of these is "managed democracy" (sometimes called political authoritarianism), which modern European history scholar Daniel Beer explained as "the centralisation of political and economic power, the emasculation of parliamentary politics, the muzzling of the media, a return to the rhetoric of Great Russian nationalism and a bullying interference in the affairs of neighbouring states." This system was engineered by Putin and other political elites not only to consolidate their power but, through structure and ideology, to contrast the chaos of the Yeltsin presidency<sup>10</sup>.

This contrast is important because it helps explain Putin's consistently high domestic popularity. Though critical of the system, informally referred to as Putinism, Beer's explanation

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<sup>9</sup> Pantin, I.K. *Overcoming the Split Between State and Society*. 2009. Russian Studies in Philosophy, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 65-73. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

<sup>10</sup> Beer, Daniel. *Russia's Managed Democracy*. May 2009. History Today, vol. 59, issue 5. pp. 37-39.

of managed democracy focuses on how disasters with previous experiments in liberal democracy underlie Russian's preference for a strongman over a reformer. Without the historical or structural support for a democracy, Russia's first experiments with liberal democracy resulted in its President assaulting parliament with tanks and political upheavals that repeatedly brought it to the brink of civil war. He also highlights that, despite managed democracy's similarities to the Soviet Union in certain structures and attitudes, it is vital to avoid labeling Putin's Russia an successor to that authoritarian system. Doing so distracts from the more important lesson that the emergence of managed democracy is primarily a result of "the destabilising power of democracy in a country without strong traditions of the rule of law and a developed and robust civil society"<sup>11</sup>."

In 2003, following a large parliamentary victory for Putin's United Russia Party, Wegren and Konitzer published an article on the future of managed democracy. They predicted that both Putin and his successor would be able to use the popularity of the system and the president to continue to strengthen Putinism. This came true in the 2007 Duma elections, and in each election since. "Barring the rise of a significant new challenger, the disintegration of United Russia or any other unforeseen events, the stage is set for further strengthening of the Kremlin and its political allies, and the continuation of 'managed democracy,'" they concluded<sup>12</sup>. Even those seeking to derail this trend admit that their conclusion is nearly as valid looking forward from 2012 as it was a decade ago.

Professor Julie Hemment of the University of Massachusetts offers a more explicit exploration of the relationship between Putin- Yeltsin- and Soviet-style democracy. "Between 2001 and 2006," she argued, "Putin succeeded in accomplishing a degree of liberalization that

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Wegren, Stephen K; Konitzer, Andrew. *Prospects for Managed Democracy in Russia*. Sep. 2007. Europe-Asia Studies, vol. 59, no. 6. pp. 1025-1047. University of Glasgow. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

his predecessors had only dreamed of," referring to pension reform and renewed social welfare programs. His welfare policies "resurrect cultural forms associated with the Soviet state, and at the same time the state is actively engaged in engineering new approaches to citizenship," she said. For this reason, Hemment describes Putinism as "Soviet-style neoliberalism," a categorization that is primarily used by American and some European scholars. Her argument captures the liberalizing aspect of Putin's administration that often confounds or is overlooked by Western observers, and results in the less pessimistic prediction that neoliberalism can succeed in Russia when, as is currently the case, it is "undertaken partially by a popular domestic actor and coupled with nationalist and collectivist goals<sup>13</sup>." The most useful feature of Hemment's analysis, however, is its elucidation of the relationship between past and present trends in Russian politics.

In opposition to Hemment's optimism, Timm Beichelt cited continuing Communist tendencies in Russia to define "embedded democracy." This has a quantitative advantage over Hemment's theory; his argument is much more strongly based in existing theory and statistical analysis. Beichelt's study focused on the applicability of Wolfgang Merkel's analysis of defective democracy to the cases of post-Soviet Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Merkel laid out three dimensions of democracy: the vertical dimension of power legitimization and control, the horizontal dimension of the liberal constitutional state, and the dimension of agenda control. From these dimensions, he derived five "partial regimes of democracy," all of which must function properly in order for a state to be considered a liberal democracy.

The five partial regimes are: the electoral and public space regimes, which belong to the vertical dimension; the regimes of political rights and systemic checks and balances, which

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<sup>13</sup> Hemment, Julie. *Soviet-Style Neoliberalism? Nashi, Youth Volunteerism, and the Restructuring of Social Welfare in Russia*. Nov/Dec 2009. Problems of Post-Communism, vol. 56, no. 6. pp. 36-50. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

belong to the horizontal dimension; and the regime governing the transfer of power from electorate to elites, which belongs to the agenda control dimension. Of particular importance to the Russian case is Merkel's finding that "defective democracies are by no means transitional regimes," as many scholars describe Russia. "They tend to form stable links to their economic and societal environment and are often seen by considerable parts of the elites and the population as an adequate institutional solution to the specific problems of governing 'effectively,'" he wrote. "As long as the equilibrium between problems, context and power lasts, defective democracies will survive for protracted periods of time<sup>14</sup>."

Beichelt's study credibly shows that Merkel's dimensions are applicable, and uses data from Freedom House and other election and human rights monitoring organizations to quantify the state of Russian democracy. He concludes that Russia meets the qualifications of a "defective democracy," and that it should move towards liberal democracy by reforming each of the five regimes<sup>15</sup>. His study provides ample evidence that authoritarianism in Russia is not wise or viable in the long run. Additionally, Beichelt and Merkel's concepts are useful in directly comparing the potential paths Russian leaders may take, and the degree to which certain policies will move the country toward liberal democracy.

The fact that Russia has not evolved fully towards liberal democracy, or at all by some accounts, does not discount Fukuyama's argument that the ideology of Western democracy would spread as the basis for future governments. Early this year he defended and updated his position in *The Future of History* published in Foreign Affairs. In it, he maintained that Western democracy is the endpoint of ideology, and argued that the global shrinking of the middle class

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<sup>14</sup> Merkel, Wolfgang. *Defekte Demokratien*. 1999. Wolfgang Merkel and Andreas Busch, eds. Demokratie in Ost und West. Frankfurt A.M.: Suhrkamp. pp.361–81.

<sup>15</sup> Beichelt, Timm. *Autocracy and democracy in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine*. Dec 2004. Democratization, vol. 11, issue 5. pp 113-132. ISSN: 13510347. Taylor & Francis Publishing.

has necessitated rethinking "the narrative of the past generation: that [the middle class] interests will be best served by ever-freer markets and smaller states." He advocated the need for an "ideology of the future that could provide a realistic path toward a world with healthy middle-class societies and robust democracies<sup>16</sup>." This new ideology is certainly not Putin's sovereign democracy.

Finally, many pundits and experts have tried to categorize Russia's potential future paths of political development, and it is vital that this analysis have a recognized and comprehensive method of labeling and describing these possibilities. One of the most popular set of scenarios was developed jointly in a February report by the Liberal Mission Foundation and the Indem Foundation, titled *Scenario-Based Forecasting of the Political Situation in Russia*. The article presents a realistic and comprehensive set of five possible political developments, ranging from "inert Russia," characterized by nonexistent political reform and the strict continuation of current Kremlin ideology, to "political chaos," resulting from a power struggle among emerging parties. This study was produced primarily with the input of writers for the Russian news outlet Novaya Gazeta, and has been the subject of little discussion outside that paper<sup>17,18</sup>. Due to this lack of peer review and critical examination, this analysis will instead rely on the much more debated and expounded upon categorizations laid out and explored by Melville and Timofeev in their 2009 report, *Russia 2020: Alternative Scenarios and Public Preferences*.

In the report, Melville and Timofeev develop four possible scenarios for Russian politics in 2020, based on international trends and domestic issues. While these four generalizations by

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<sup>16</sup> Fukuyama, Francis. *The Future of History*. Jan/Feb 2012. Foreign Affairs. Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

<sup>17</sup> Libskiy, Andrey. *The Authorities will not 'finish us off,' but dialogue with them will not work either. What may lie in store for us in the immediate future.* 5 March, 2012. Novaya Gazeta, via Johnson's Russia List. JRL.org.

<sup>18</sup> Blagoveshchenskiy, Yuriy; Krechetova, Mariya; Satarov, Georgiy. *Scenario-Based Forecasting of the Political Situation in Russia*. Feb. 2012. Novaya Gazeta. Novayagazeta.ru.

no means present every possible endpoint of development, they identify a spectrum of options that because they are based concretely on past and present challenges of Russian politics, will be useful in predicting the future state of Russian politics.

In the first scenario, "Kremlin Gambit," high oil prices and global economic growth continue until 2020, and the BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) greatly increase their share of the world GDP. Relations between the West and Russia continue to cool, mostly due to ongoing Western criticism of Russian domestic and foreign policy and of its coercive use of energy resources. Most importantly, in this scenario the vertical power institutions created by Putin remain largely intact, and state economic controls and continued domination of domestic policy by the executive branch through "sovereign democracy," result in a strong, internationally respected state. In this situation, the opposition has few resources and little public support, much like Putin's first two terms. The defining factor of the "Kremlin Gambit" is "the restriction of political and economic competition in the country to serve the strategic goal of modernizing Russia." This scenario is a projection of the current logic and strategic plan of the current Russian leadership.

The second scenario is "Fortress Russia," which results from a deterioration in international law and stability. In this situation, the West gives up on reforming Russia, leading both sides to return to a Cold War mentality of competition and economic independence of each other. The worsening economic situation in Russia gives rise to an even more powerful state, completely dominated by the federal center. In this prediction, the Kremlin continues to restrict individual rights and freedoms, and legitimizes their actions by embracing and projecting the image of Russia as a "fortress" of stability in a chaotic international arena. This scenario is based

on "the strongest possible defensive reaction" to an increasingly hostile and chaotic international sphere.

The third scenario, "Russian Mosaic," predicts a dominance of "the Western model" of globalization, with emerging economies like Russia's retaining their national character but, for the most part, following the Western example. International organizations are strong and promote trade between Russia and the West, mostly because Russia has agreed to "play 'by the rules,'" and integrate into what Melville calls "the Western community." In the "Mosaic," prediction, the state is more decentralized, allowing regions that do not rely on Moscow subsidies to assert greater sovereignty in setting local policy. This situation is akin to the 1990s, with economic deregulation leading to the growth of corruption and the income gap, although with greater economic opportunities for average citizens. While this situation is appealing to the West and reformers within Russia, focus groups conducted as part of *Russia 2020* revealed that ordinary Russians fear this option the most, regardless of their political leaning; they believed a weakened federal state would lead the country back to the chaos and corruption of the Yeltsin years. This scenario contrasts the "Fortress Russia" prediction, in that a lessening of global pressure creates conditions under which "Russian political tradition lacks an adequate 'instinct for self-preservation,'" resulting in the haphazard dismantling of state apparatus.

Finally, the most idealistic scenario is the "New Dream," in which by 2020 international institutions like the UN undergo serious reform in order to strengthen the rule of international law, and the global "North-South Gap" is decreasing. In this situation, the domination of Western institutions like NATO (which is heavily involved in the "Mosaic" scenario) is nonexistent, and the UN is the dominant force in international politics. According to the study, this scenario is the one that would best allow Russia to focus on "internal modernization," as

slowly declining oil prices give it the time and motivation to invest in technology and human capital. Most importantly, a coalition of "young technocrats," unstained by the corruption of the 1990s and with no memory of the Soviet period gain control over political mechanisms, and are the first generation of Russian politicians willing to push the country to "live in a new way." There is respect for the necessity and universality of law that currently does not exist in Russia today, emphasis on individual success, and a large, influential middle class. Describing the "New Dream" scenario, Melville and Timofeev said: "The members of Russia's new and active generation have an interest in open political and economic competition. This is their 'new dream' - a dream that gradually turns into reality<sup>19</sup>."

Though published over a year before the rise of the protest movement in Russia, this scenario echoes many of the goals of the illicit opposition. Although starting with the same general international conditions as "Russian Mosaic," this situation differs in that a new generation of Russian leaders effectively and decisively affirms the norms of a developed democratic state, based on realistic and impartial evaluations of Russia's post-1980s development. Importantly, this scenario is the only one which represents a genuine political "breakthrough," according to the authors, wherein Russia could create "competitive and highly effective political and economic practices [that] mature independently and are not copied from any external models.

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<sup>19</sup> Melville, Andrei; Timofeev, Ivan. *Russia 2020: Alternative Scenarios and Public Preferences*. Russian Politics and Law, vol. 47, no. 6, November-December 2009, pp. 7-33. 2009 M.E. Sharpe, Inc. ISSN: 1061-1940/2009.



## **The Official 2012 Presidential Candidates**

### **Vladimir Putin**

After widespread accusations of election fraud and political cronyism in an election that resulted in a 25 percent drop in his party's parliamentary representation, any presidential candidate would rightly fear for his political future. Any politician, that is, except the unflappable Vladimir Putin. As former-President Boris Yeltsin's chosen successor in 2000, Putin presided over eight years of economic growth before handing power to trusted ally Dmitry Medvedev and becoming the most powerful and influential post-Soviet Russian Prime Minister. Four years later, Medvedev is ready to cede the presidency back to his mentor and partner, with new constitutional term limits allowing the winner of March's election to potentially retain the presidency until 2024.

Though the political opposition in post-Soviet Russia has never been stronger, it had little chance of ever upsetting the plans of the Putin/Medvedev tandem this March. United Russia, the party that sponsors Putin (though he is not officially a member)<sup>20</sup>, suffered a drop in popularity in December's Duma election, but they have maintained a low profile since and regained much support. According to polls by the independent Levada Center, the party's support among Russians has risen 11 percentage points from a low of 30 percent approval immediately following the December election.<sup>21</sup>

Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center, told Reuters before the election that Putin would easily secure a first-round victory with 63-66 percent of the vote, while Communist leader

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<sup>20</sup> von Twickel, Nikolaus. *Candidate Profiles: Vladimir Putin*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>

<sup>21</sup> Nagornyykh, Irina. *The Less of United Russia, the Better it is Liked*. Kommersant, No. 33, Feb. 24, 2012. p2.

Gennady Zyuganov will once again take second place, with 15 percent.<sup>22</sup> State-run VTsIOM, known for making accurate predictions despite a pro-Kremlin bias, predicted that Putin would receive 58.6 percent, and Zyuganov 14.8.<sup>23</sup> These predictions were very close to the truth: Putin ultimately went home with nearly 64 percent of the vote.

In December's Duma elections, United Russia won 49.5 percent of the vote. Though they had a wide margin of victory, it was a 15 percentage point drop from the 2007 elections. Politicians and experts alike saw this as a sign of growing dissatisfaction with Putin's anti-democratic tendencies. This dissatisfaction has translated into unprecedented and once-unthinkable speculation about a post-Putin Russia. With less than a month to go before the election Andrei Kostin, the chief executive of VTB, one of Russia's largest state-controlled banks, openly challenged the appropriateness of Putin's continued political dominance. Amidst praise for his success at stabilizing the country in the early years of his rule, and pronouncing that Putin would have no trouble winning his third presidential term, Kostin suggested that Putin should not run again after 2012, because "no leaders of democratic countries have been in power so long."<sup>24</sup>

Recognizing that his margin of victory, rather than the victory itself, would represent a referendum on Putin's chosen direction for Russian democracy, Putin went to great pains in the weeks leading up to election day to lay out his vision for Russia's future and defend his presidential record in the global press with a series of articles that each focus on a distinct policy

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<sup>22</sup> Faulconbridge, Guy. *Facing hostility, Putin to win the Kremlin: poll*. Reuters.com. US Edition. Feb. 24, 2012. Thomson Reuters. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/24/us-russia-election-idUSTRE81N0CF20120224>>

<sup>23</sup> Faulconbridge, Guy. *Putin to win Russian election in first round - poll*. UK.Reuters.com. UK Edition. Feb. 20, 2012. Thomson Reuters. <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/02/20/uk-russia-election-putin-idUKTRE81J0PR20120220>>

<sup>24</sup> *VTB's Kostin Suggests Putin Limit Himself to Single Term*. Feb. 14, 2012. Moscow Times Business. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/vtbs-kostin-suggests-putin-limit-himself-to-single-term/452991.html>>

area. In an English op-ed in the Washington Post and a longer Russian article in the daily Kommersant, he defended his authoritarian take on democracy as the necessary step between Soviet communism and fully-functional democratic capitalism. In the Kommersant version, Putin wrote:

In the early 1990s...It seemed that the transition to government by the people would be quick, especially since we had models of civilised and mature democracies in the form of the United States and Western Europe readily to hand. But the introduction of democratic mechanisms to Russia meant that nearly all of the necessary economic reforms were brought to a halt, and these mechanisms were later taken over by the local and central oligarchic elites, who shamelessly exploited the state and divided up the nation's wealth for their own benefit.<sup>25</sup>

Putin writes clearly and unapologetically of his decisions to stifle democratic practices at various points as president and prime minister. He makes clear reference to his record of economic growth, arguing not only that basic forms of democracy were detrimental to those efforts, but that the example of the West in forming democratic institutions should be completely disregarded. Throughout the article, Putin makes explicit accusations that the Oligarchs had exploited the fledgling Russian democracy, but his underlying argument is aimed at blunting the criticisms of those "mature democracies," who have increasingly attacked Putin for his anti-democratic actions.

By using the domestic and foreign press to criticize western influence, Putin reinforced his image as a nationalist and as a strongman, an image that always played well for him among Russians but that had softened during his premiership. In a recent mass rally in Moscow, with

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<sup>25</sup> Putin, Vladimir. *Democracy and the quality of government*. 6 Feb. 2012. Kommersant. Via Government of the Russian Federation. <<http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/18006/>> . Translation via Kommersant 2/17/12.

over 100,000 attendees, Putin declared, "We will not allow anyone to impose their will on us. We have our own will and this has always helped us be victorious. We are a victorious nation. This is in our genes. This is in our genetic code." He argued that Russia has its own path towards full democracy, and of course that his heavy-handed approach is needed to guide Russia down that path. "The battle for Russia continues," he told raucous supporters. "Victory will be ours."<sup>26</sup>

Virtually guaranteed victory without such articles, Putin undertook these massive efforts to rally his political base with a vehement defense of his own record throughout February, replete with a renewed nationalism and actions that asserted Russia's independence from western pressure. The most consequential example of this was Russia's decision, along with China, to veto a UN Security Council resolution calling on Syrian president Bashir al-Assad to step down in the face of violence against political protesters. In an article published in state-owned RIA Novosti and focused on defending his foreign policy, Putin wrote that he had supported the veto to prevent a "Libyan scenario in Syria." He was referring to NATO actions in Libya last year that resulted in the overthrow and death of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, which Russia and China both labeled a violation of Libyan sovereignty.

Not content with only the tacit condemnation of western foreign policy, he called the Syria resolution a "an ambiguous resolution that would have encouraged one side of this domestic conflict to resort to violence." Skillfully driving home his view on foreign policy, he said, "I would like to warn our Western colleagues against....the use of power in Syria without UN Security Council sanctions...[the vetoed resolution] only lacked the demand that the armed

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<sup>26</sup> AFP. *Vladimir Putin vows victory in election*. The Telegraph. Feb. 23, 2012. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/9100338/Vladimir-Putin-vows-victory-in-election.html>.

opposition do the same as the government...The refusal to do so is cynical.<sup>27</sup>" Putin's article presents an articulate and logical explanation of his foreign policy rationale; one that is sure to be uncomfortable for western readers, but very appealing to Russian conservatives. Most importantly, he defines his foreign policy in a way that differentiates it from western norms strongly enough to satisfy his supporters but without a hawkishness that could deter more liberal (though not necessarily pro-western) voters.

Overall, Putin's use of foreign and domestic media has very successfully done two things; reminded his supporters that he is looking out for Russian interests above all else, and reasserted to the international community that he is not afraid to show independence from institutions like the UN that, in his view, are dominated by the West. His arguments are sure to solidify his base, and remind a few people why they voted for him in 2000 and 2004: this effect has been shown in his rising poll numbers since December.

In outlining his worldview, Putin defended the undemocratic aspects of his administration as necessary, but he did not deal realistically with the future implications of such authoritarianism. As Beichelt's study showed, an authoritarian leader can only be healthy for a transitional democracy in the short term, something that even supporters like Kostin are realizing. Putin looks more than ever like he did in 2000: a sharp and exceptionally skilled politician, but it is also evident that if Putin does not evolve into a more democratic leader, he will soon, if he has not already, cease to be healthy for Russia.

Despite the growing support of Putin, the same pollsters are showing an increase in resentment against the length and authoritarian tone of his rule. The Levada poll showed that a large minority of Russians are dissatisfied with the political system put in place over Putin's 12

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<sup>27</sup> Putin, Vladimir. *Russia and the Changing World*. RIA Novosti. Feb. 27, 2012. EN.RIAN.ru. World Edition. <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120227/171547818.html>>.

years in power, and a third support the recent protests against alleged voting fraud by United Russia last December.<sup>28</sup> The director of Moscow's Center for Strategic Research, a government-created think tank designed to help write Putin's first presidential platform, believes the growing resentment of the establishment means that Putin is not likely to serve a full six-year term, and should follow Yeltsin's example and hastily find a reliable successor. "The pro-Putin majority is either already gone or about to disappear," he said.<sup>29</sup> Television host and longtime friend of Putin Kseniya Sobchak agreed, telling the New York Times that "The regime we have now cannot last six years...this movement will pick up force and eventually it may lead to...revolution."

"I want you to understand that I don't want it to happen," she continued. "I just realize that this Titanic will hit an iceberg if it doesn't change course."<sup>30</sup> Though the current social upheaval does not seem sufficient to defeat him in March, dissatisfaction from a disappearing middleclass that had its genesis in Putin's policies is likely to grow over the next six years. The true test for Putin starting March 5 will be to prove that he can become a more democratic leader. He must be able to respond to the changing needs of ordinary Russians who live in a far more stable society than they did 12 years ago. The irony is probably not lost on Putin that he can be credited with making the country healthy enough that citizens can demand even more responsive, fair, governance instead of worrying about starvation, war, and poverty.

United Russia member and Putin campaign worker Olga V. Kryshtanovskaya said that Putin has naturally authoritarian tendencies, which will push him away from evolving his

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<sup>28</sup> Faulconbridge, Guy. *Facing hostility, Putin to win the Kremlin: poll*. Reuters.com. US Edition. Feb. 24, 2012. Thomson Reuters. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/24/us-russia-election-idUSTRE81N0CF20120224>>.

<sup>29</sup> White, Gregory L. *After Putin*. The Wall Street Journal. Feb. 25, 2012. Online.WSJ.com. Dow Jones & Company, Inc. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203960804577241392587109400.html>>

<sup>30</sup> Barry, Ellen. *Resolute Putin Faces a Russia That's Changed*. New York Times. Feb. 23, 2012. NYTimes.com. 2012 The New York Times Company. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/24/world/europe/a-resolute-putin-faces-a-changing-russia.html>>.

regime. If he decides to liberalize in the face of growing opposition, she says it will be "with his intellect, and not with his heart, and under pressure, because he is afraid...He will decide alone and that's it."<sup>31</sup> Experts have commented that the pressure from the opposition is, for the first time in his rule, effecting Putin's behavior. His public appearance at the Moscow rally, for example, was a departure from his usually low-key demeanor and distaste for mass rallies. His public appeal in front of a legion of supporters was necessary, however, to improve the president's image in the face of the genuine passion of opposition protesters. As commentator and host of Kommersant FM radio Konstantin von Eggert explained, "for the first time since his coming to power in 1999-2000 Mr. Putin has to prove to the population at large that he still commands its support."<sup>32</sup>

Putin is a complex and effective leader; though usually quiet and reserved, he has a strong ability to channel the emotions of ordinary Russians into rabid public support from youth and political organizations (which, of course, he helped create). Based on recent polling, Putin's personal vision for Russia that he laid out in the press, and the commentary of Russian political experts, there are two possibilities for what the election and its immediate aftermath will mean for the past-and-future president: he will begrudgingly liberalize and, possibly, preserve his legacy; or he will reinforce vertical power structures in an attempt to maintain a system of authoritarian democracy, stoking the resentment of opposition groups.

Putin gained massive popularity in the late nineties because he was perceived as a strong leader who could end the anarchy and fear of the Yeltsin era. His successor will need to be perceived as a dedicated reformer. This makes it unlikely that he would select Medvedev, who has always been ridiculed as little more than a stand-in and puppet, or anyone from United

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> von Eggert, Konstantin. *Putin may need to change his tune*. RIA Novosti. Feb. 24, 2012.

Russia, due to the party's declining public support. At the same time, however, that successor must be seen as strong enough to preserve Putin's stability and Russia's national interest. Putin has, in the past, played a role in creating political parties, and it would not be surprising for an ostensibly more liberal, reformist version of United Russia (potentially his All-Russia People's Front) to appear after March 4<sup>th</sup>, from which Putin's successor may ultimately emerge.

If Putin succeeds in finding such a politician, his most difficult task will be to prove to the public that the successor has both of these qualities. Like Kostin and Sobchak, I predict that Putin will not serve out his entire term. Far from being forced out by political upheaval - an embarrassment Putin is savvy enough to avoid - it is probable that he, like Yeltsin before him, will step down near the end of his term and allow his protégé to prove himself in office before ever being placed on a ballot.

In his estimation, any lessening of the his anti-western rhetoric would weaken his position domestically, compounding the challenge to his rule presented by anti-Kremlin demonstrators. The protesters are not definitively pro- or anti-western, so even in responding to demands for reform Putin will not embrace the example of western democracies.

Some experts believe that even the above scenario, in which Russia moves decisively towards more open democracy, will be impossible under Putin. Founder of Mercator Analytical Group, member of the Presidential Council for Human Rights and Civil Society, and Russian political analyst Dmitri Oreshkin recently told Kommersant that he believes Putin will become more authoritarian following the election. "In Putin's logic, [abdicating to preserve democratization] would mean destabilizing the vertical axis and revising everything he has



built," said Oreshkin. "As a product of the Soviet system, he will never be able to avoid this temptation to make simple decisions."<sup>33</sup>

Oreshkin said the proof of his claim is Putin's recent entourage changes - the Prime Minister recently replaced administration Deputy Head Vladislav Surkov with a prominent United Russia leader Vyacheslav Volodin. Though this was ostensibly done to appease protesters, who have more favorable attitudes towards Volodin as a reformer, Oreshkin called him a "battering ram...who will trample on anyone who does not get out of the way."<sup>34</sup>

Conservative political analyst and founder and director of the National Strategy Institute Stanislav Belkovsky agreed that Surkov and Volodin differ only in their methods and current favor within the Kremlin. "There are no ideologically significant differences between Surkov and Volodin," he said<sup>35</sup>.

Until the new administration has fully taken shape and begun to make policy, analysts will likely remain sharply divided over whether appointments like Volodin's are designed to create lasting reforms, pander to protesters, or reinforce Putin's vertical power structure. With a expert political mind like Putin's running the show, all of these things or none of them could have motivated the surprising pre-election reshuffling of officials. Yet public uncertainty about Putin's intentions are in no way indicative of uncertainty in the Kremlin. Though taken aback by the handful of all-too-rare Russian political surprises last year, Putin's supporters, keen political mind, and thorough control over a political system of his own design has given him indisputable control of the chessboard.

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<sup>33</sup> Nagornykh, Irina. *Dimitriy Oreshkin Predicts Putin will Pursue Harder Line after March Elections*. *Kommersant*. Feb. 20, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Lobzina, Alina. *Surkov job change leaves analysts double guessing*. The Moscow News. Dec. 28, 2011. <<http://themoscownews.com/politics/20111228/189332168.html>>.

### Gennady Zyuganov & the Communist Party

Perennial presidential runner-up for nearly two decades, Gennady Zyuganov rose through the party ranks in the Soviet Union before helping found the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), which he became head of in 1993. As its chairman, Zyuganov revitalized the party after the dissolution of the Soviet Communist Party and led it to strong showings in the 1993 and 1995 Duma elections. Along with his strong criticisms of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika reforms in the late 1980s, these early successes made Zyuganov the most viable opposition candidate to challenge President Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential elections<sup>36</sup>. Running on a platform of state economic intervention and protectionism, Zyuganov promised stronger social welfare programs and advocated the rebuilding of a multi-state apparatus resembling the Soviet Union<sup>37</sup>.

When the election arrived that June, Zyuganov did something unthinkable in modern Russian politics: he came in second to the incumbent by a mere 3 percentage points, necessitating the only presidential runoff election in Russian history. Though he ultimately lost, the party chair received an still-unmatched 40 percent of the vote (Yeltsin received 53 percent)<sup>38</sup>. Zyuganov ran twice more for president, placing a distant second to Putin in 2000 and Medvedev in 2008. Notably, in the two presidential elections in which Zyuganov was not a candidate (in 1991 and 2004), the Communist Party candidate still placed second<sup>39</sup>. Before even looking at a single piece of polling data, it was clear that the unapologetic Communist is the strongest

<sup>36</sup> Russiapedia. *Prominent Russians: Gennady Zyuganov*. RT.com. © Autonomous Nonprofit Organization “TV-Novosti”, 2005–2011. <<http://russiapeda.rt.com/prominent-russians/politics-and-society/gennady-zyuganov/>>

<sup>37</sup> McFaul, Michael. *Russia's 1996 presidential election: the end of polarized politics*. 1997. Hoover Press.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Communist Party of the Russian Federation. *Zyuganov, Gennady Adreivich: Personal Page*. KPRF.ru/personal/zyuganov. 2/22/12.

opposition candidate whose name will actually appear on ballots in March. He proved this by yet again taking second place, receiving just over 17 percent of the vote.

The data confirmed this assumption long before March 4<sup>th</sup>: the independent Levada Center and state-run Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) have both estimated since January Zyuganov would capture somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of March's vote.<sup>40,41</sup> Yet Zyuganov in 2012 is a different candidate than Zyuganov in 1996, and he ran in a vastly changed global and domestic political landscape. Though his modern platforms are fundamentally the same as those he ran on 15 years ago, the renewed energy of the opposition movement has raised the question of whether Zyuganov could restore some of the lost prestige of the KPRF and, more importantly, what it would mean for Russian progress if he did.

Once seen as the single greatest threat to the sustenance of a strong Russian democracy, enough time has elapsed since the dissolution of the USSR that peoples' fears of a full return to Soviet life have faded, allowing Zyuganov to court support outside of the Communist base for the first time at least since Putin came to power in 2000. Voters confirmed this in December, when the KPRF received a 20 percent share in the parliamentary elections<sup>42</sup>. Appearing more mainstream and less overtly radical than in previous elections, the KPRF has been able to expand its base among textile workers and employees in industrial sectors that have declined since the fall of the Soviet Union<sup>43</sup>. The party's less radical platform, though at its heart promoting the

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<sup>40</sup> Faulconbridge, Guy. *Facing hostility, Putin to win the Kremlin: poll*. Reuters.com. US Edition. Feb. 24, 2012. Thomson Reuters. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/24/us-russia-election-idUSTRE81N0CF20120224>>

<sup>41</sup> Russian Public Opinion Research Center. *Revolution or Evolution? Russian Elections - 2012*. VTsIOM. Press Release No. 1410. <<http://wciom.com/index.php?id=61>>.

<sup>42</sup> Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation. *Results of the 2011 Duma Election and Referendum*. 2011. Translated 2/5/2012. <[http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100028713304&vrn=100100028713299&region=0&global=1&sub\\_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100028713304&type=233](http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100028713304&vrn=100100028713299&region=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100028713304&type=233)>.

<sup>43</sup> Kim, Lucian. *Putin's Willing Helpers: The Apparatchik*. Lucian in Moscow. Feb. 23, 2012. <<http://lucianinmoscow.blogspot.com/2012/02/putins-willing-helpers-zyuganov.html>>

same ideals of Zyuganov's 1996 campaign, has proven more palatable to voters and observers hoping to see an upset in March. For most, the platform is still woefully outdated.

"Social forms of property will dominate," the party chair said during his 1996 run. "[An] under-regulated market has never existed and never will." This economic message was "extremely anti-Western," said current US Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul in his analysis of the 1996 election<sup>44</sup>. Today, the official KPRF platform maintains the ideological basis for these economic and nationalist positions. It states, "Russian communists believe that the fundamental dispute between capitalism and socialism, which took place under the banner of the twentieth century, is incomplete. Despite the temporary retreat of the revolutionary movement, the modern epoch represents the transition from capitalism to socialism."<sup>45</sup>

Over his career, Zyuganov has become better able to package this message for a public that, having left behind the fear of the Yeltsin era and experienced a stable post-Soviet Russia, is less nostalgic about its socialist past. The populist demands of the protesters have most effectively allowed the candidate to highlight his intended social reforms - like increased state support and education for young people, the reinstatement of free medical care, and greater state support to rural areas - with greater contemporary relevance. Under his rule, Zyuganov says that Russia would possess a "government of people's trust," that he pledges would be pluralistic and include nonpartisan groups.

Despite his effective leveraging of popular issues against the Kremlin, serious doubts remain as to whether Zyuganov can really gain the support of Russia's emerging left-wing and youth opposition. Although his party enjoys the most voter support of any official opposition party, he has been unable to prove himself to the unofficial and illegal opposition movements,

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<sup>44</sup> McFaul, Michael. *Russia's 1996 presidential election: the end of polarized politics*. 1997. Hoover Press.

<sup>45</sup> KPRF. *Official Party Platform of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation*. KPRF.ru. Translated 2/15/12. <<http://www.kprf.ru/party/program/>>.

whose support will be vital for any politician to craft the disparate anti-Kremlin elements into a cohesive and effective opposition.

In a recent opinion poll of participants in the Moscow protests, conducted by VTsIOM, Zyuganov was the second-least preferred representative of the illicit opposition in hypothetical talks with the authorities, with just 10 percent. Topping the list were former leader of the Yabloko party Grigory Yavlinsky and blogger Aleksei Navalny, with 25 percent each. LDPR candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy received 16 percent reflecting the nationalist component of the movement, and independent candidate Mikhail Prokhorov garnered 14 percent. Just Russia leader Sergey Mironov placed last, with the support of just 3 percent of the protesters<sup>46</sup>.

This poll reveals a deep distrust within the protest movement of any sanctioned political institution: the four official opposition candidates took the bottom spots on the list, with the only independent candidate polling higher than two party-affiliated candidates. Though the KPRF has the largest base of support of any opposition party, that base is made up largely of pensioners<sup>47</sup>. There is little evidence to suggest that the aging Zyuganov can capture the anger, and votes, of Russia's youth.

If he is able to become a strong leader in the opposition movement, the communist would certainly meet with indifference if not outright condemnation from the West. There is virtually no hope that he would move the country towards an open, pluralistic, democracy, as he has been an even more outspoken and vehement critic of the western vision of democratic development than Putin.

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<sup>46</sup> Russian Public Opinion Research Center. *Most protesters seek dialogue with authorities poll*. Feb. 15, 2012. VTsIOM. via russiatoday.com.

<sup>47</sup> Odynova, Alexandra. *Candidate Profiles: Gennady Zyuganov*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>.

Despite the growing discord between Washington and Moscow, Putin made significant choices that were praised by the West. For example, Putin brought Russia into the World Trade Organization, more fully integrating Russia into the global economy thereby delighting US and European leaders. Former Special Advisor to the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and political consultant Anthony Salvia said in a recent commentary that, on issues like this, "a Red Kremlin is unlikely to cooperate with Washington to the degree Putin has." Salvia argues that Washington's desire to see and "exploit" a Zyuganov victory stems from a "revolutionary, utopian view of the world."<sup>48</sup> That worldview, which can be viewed as the result of a strong Wilsonian trend in American foreign policy, is antithetical to the outlook of a realist like Putin, who views the world in terms of power balances and national interest in an anarchic global community.

Ultimately, Zyuganov lacks the support outside of the KPRF base to become an effective leader of the opposition. His second place victory in March was not notable enough to propel him to greater prominence or credibility. Zyuganov, despite appearing to be the strongest opposition candidate by the numbers, has been unable to keep his party and its platform relevant in the new, Putin-crafted Russia. If, by nothing short of a miracle of solidarity, he or a future KPRF leader takes the presidency in a future election, the new Russian government would bear striking international similarities and equally remarkable domestic differences with the Putin era.

### **Vladimir Zhirinovsky and the Liberal Democrats**

If you, the international observer, find Vladimir Putin and Gennady Zyuganov's nationalist rhetoric disquieting, allow me to introduce Vladimir Zhirinovsky of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR). Mr. Zhirinovsky has no need for long newspaper

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<sup>48</sup> Salvia, Anthony. *Who does Washington prefer - Putin or Zyuganov?* Feb. 8, 2012. The Jerusalem Post.

commentaries to make his intentions for Russian democracy and foreign policy perfectly clear, nor does he require much viability as a candidate to make Russia's fledgling reform movement nervous. "We are not the West. We have our own civilization," said Zhirinovsky following the 2003 Duma elections - a sentiment with which Putin, Zyuganov, and any sensible Russian politician would wisely agree. But Zhirinovsky is anything but sensible, and misses no opportunity to wave his ultraconservative, ultranationalist flag. "There will be no democracy in Russia," he boisterously continued, on the verge of shouting. "No independent courts. No press freedom. Either accept it or leave."<sup>49</sup>

It is in tirades like these - and there are plenty to choose from - that Zhirinovsky has earned himself the image of a boisterous buffoon. Between referring to political rivals as "well fed pigs" and physically throwing disagreeable pundits off talk show sets, yelling "throw him out and execute him there in the corridor," over the distraught host<sup>50</sup>, Zhirinovsky's wild behavior and extreme nationalist rhetoric have greatly delegitimized the LDPR as a viable component of Russia's opposition. In less heated moments he has shown a cavalier attitude that has likewise diminished his viability.

Take a recent question and answer event in Moscow, where the candidate was asked what he would do as president. His immediate response: "Russia needs a new electromagnetic weapon that will be able to cause tsunamis, heat waves and earthquakes." He then briefly returned to the realm of political rationality, saying he would implement a new excise tax, and,

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<sup>49</sup> The Moscow Times. *MT Profiles: Vladimir Zhirinovsky*. The Moscow Times Online. Feb. 20 2012. <[http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt\\_profile/vladimir-zhirinovsky/434232.html](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt_profile/vladimir-zhirinovsky/434232.html)>.

<sup>50</sup> World News. *Vladimir Zhirinovsky at his best*. WN.com. 2012 World News Inc. <[http://wn.com/Vladimir\\_Zhirinovsky\\_at\\_his\\_best\\_with\\_english\\_subs\\_Russian\\_politician](http://wn.com/Vladimir_Zhirinovsky_at_his_best_with_english_subs_Russian_politician)>.

slightly more outlandishly, create "a new Russian empire," before closing on the baffling statement "Iran will be carved in half between Russia and the U.S."<sup>51</sup>

Associate Professor of European Studies at Johns Hopkins University's renowned School of Advanced International Studies Hans-Georg Betz argued that Zhirinovsky is part of a global rise in what he termed "right-wing populism." Betz discussed the modern manifestations of ultraconservative nationalist movements, and how they bear similarity in form and methodology to the rise of fascist parties between world wars. Though his 1994 book primarily deals with Western Europe, he includes Zhirinovsky's then-new LDPR as evidence that the rise in right-wing populism is global. As for how Zhirinovsky compares to his peers, Betz wrote that he "clearly [goes] beyond the ideological boundaries of radical right-wing populism elsewhere."<sup>52</sup>

Despite the extremism of its chief, the LDPR still has an 11.67 percent share in the State Duma<sup>53</sup>. The party is largely seen as an extension of Zhirinovsky<sup>54</sup>, so despite "going beyond the ideological boundaries" of other comparable political movements, the candidate still holds some credibility for his core nationalist goals: a new Russian empire and an authoritarian state. In polls over the few months before the election he received between 6 and 10 percent<sup>55</sup>.

Zhirinovsky's best asset is his experience: he has been the undisputed face of the LDPR for eighteen years, having helped it win a 22.9 percent plurality in the 1993 election, and ran in

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<sup>51</sup> Kim, Lucian. *Putin's Willing Helpers: The Buffoon*. Lucian in Moscow. Feb. 22, 2012. <<http://lucianinmoscow.blogspot.com/2012/02/putins-willing-helpers-zhirinovsky.html>>. 2/22/12.

<sup>52</sup> Betz, Hans-Georg. *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe*. 1994. St. Martin's Press. 0-312-12195-4.

<sup>53</sup> GOLOS Association. *Domestic Monitoring of Elections to the 6th State Duma of the Federal Assembly: Russian Federation, 4 December 2011 Final Report*. 27 January, 2012. Translation: Bench-Capon, Stephen.

<sup>54</sup> Shekhovtsov, Anton; Umland, Andreas. *Vladimir Zhirinovsky and the LDPR*. 26 Sep. 2011. Russian Analytical Digest No. 102 pp.14-18. Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zurich. ISSN 1863-0421.

<sup>55</sup> Krainova, Natalya. *Candidate Profiles: Vladimir Zhirinovsky*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>.



four presidential elections<sup>56</sup> without ever abandoning or watering down his rhetoric. Certainly he has, if nothing else, solidified himself as the go-to candidate for the few who consider Putin too liberal or meek. After December's Duma election he touted the return of the LDPR as Russia's "third force" in politics (although they placed fourth), a title it often held in the 1990s<sup>57</sup>. This was again the case in March, when the LDPR won just over 6 percent of the vote and came in a close fourth place (about 1.7 percent behind Prokhorov). Nationalism in Russia is on the rise, and Zhirinovsky is well established enough to capture the portion of that bloc that defects from Putin; yet it was not enough for him to do better than average this year, nor is it likely to be in future votes.

In the context of Russia's future opposition, it is unlikely that Zhirinovsky and the LDPR will be any kind of "force." While consistently coming in second among opposition parties may make the LDPR potentially influential within Russia's current, confined, loyal opposition, Zhirinovsky's relationship with the Kremlin undermines his rhetoric. Despite his and LDPR members' fervent and frequent condemnations of the ruling party, its Duma representation has consistently supported Kremlin policies since the Yeltsin era<sup>58,59</sup>. Some have gone as far as to say that the LDPR is supported by the Kremlin (something not unheard of in Putin's Russia), and exists mainly as a tool for the party of power to capture ultra-rightwing votes. Whether or not this is true, the perception of the LDPR as simply a noisy vote-channeling operation has greatly hurt its credibility.

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<sup>56</sup> The Moscow Times. *MT Profiles: Vladimir Zhirinovsky*. The Moscow Times Online. Feb. 20 2012. <[http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt\\_profile/vladimir-zhirinovsky/434232.html](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mt_profile/vladimir-zhirinovsky/434232.html)>.

<sup>57</sup> Shekhovtsov, Anton; Umland, Andreas. *Vladimir Zhirinovsky and the LDPR*. 26 Sep. 2011. Russian Analytical Digest No. 102 pp.14-18. Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zurich. ISSN 1863-0421.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Glinski, Dmitri; Reddaway, Peter. *The tragedy of Russia's reforms: market bolshevism against democracy*. pp. 209-369. 2001. Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC. ISBN 1-929223-07-2.

Though long seen as a strong contender for the nationalist vote, the LDPR failed to capitalize on rising nationalist sentiments in the country last December, making the smallest gains in the Duma of any opposition party<sup>60</sup>. This has called into doubt Zhirinovsky's ability to keep the party relevant, even among those who share his ideology. Though respected for his political longevity, he will never be able to shake his image as a clown and firecracker. With a younger, more dynamic leader the Liberal Democrats could one day be a more viable right-wing opposition party. But Zhirinovsky's name is not likely to disappear from the ballots anytime soon, nor is his message or image likely to change.

### **Sergei Mironov & A Just Russia**

Sergei Mironov is somewhat of an oddity among his opponents. The quiet, center-left leader of A Just (or Fair) Russia and former head of the Federation Council (Russia's upper house of parliament) under Putin lacks anything like Zhirinovsky's boisterous lunacy or Zyuganov's credibility as a longstanding member of the opposition. As testament to his unfortunate lack of charisma, the trained geologist consistently polled last in the run-up to March, receiving just 5 percent of the Levada Center's February 27 poll<sup>61</sup>. In the election one week later, he received less than 4 percent of the actual vote. He embarrassingly has a lower approval rating than his party<sup>62</sup>, meaning most of the scant support he received in the election was due to his party, its platform, and voters' hope that he can effectively implement it.

A Just Russia is Russia's second largest registered party with over 400,000 members, bested only by United Russia. Formed in 2006 after the break-up of the left-wing Rodina

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<sup>60</sup> GOLOS Association. *Domestic Monitoring of Elections to the 6th State Duma of the Federal Assembly: Russian Federation, 4 December 2011 Final Report*. 27 January, 2012. Translation: Bench-Capon, Stephen.

<sup>61</sup> Martinez, Ken; Pfeifer, Ezekiel. *Putin Takes Commanding Lead in Poll*. Feb. 27, 2012. The Moscow Times. TheMoscowTimes.com. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-takes-commanding-lead-in-poll/453633.html>>.

<sup>62</sup> Bratersky, Alexander. *Candidate Profiles: Sergei Mironov*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>.

(Motherland) party, allegedly at Putin's order, A Just Russia has struggled with its image as a Kremlin ally designed to absorb left-wing voters who may be skeptical of United Russia.<sup>63</sup> The party has struggled to find a stable voting bloc, and has been the smallest party represented in the Duma in the last two elections. They were able to make moderate gains of about 4.5 percent in December's elections, but were unable to match the 8 percentage point gain by the communists.<sup>64</sup> In March, Mironov placed last, with only 3.85 percent of the vote.

Both Rodina and A Just Russia are "project parties" according to Richard Sakwa, a prominent scholar of Russian politics who argues that they were both formed with the intention of capturing votes from the Communists.<sup>65</sup> It is because of this that they were not expected to achieve even the 7 percent minimum required to receive any Duma representation last December. At the time, most observers felt that the party had become politically irrelevant. As one analyst wrote before the election, A Just Russia "is the least significant national party, its contribution to political life to date has been negligible and its absence after December will make little obvious difference."<sup>66</sup>

Yet, largely due to the collapse in support of United Russia, A Just Russia managed to retain their Duma representation. The party has recently made efforts to shed its Kremlin associations, and is likely to continue to do so in light of United Russia's declining support. If they are successful, the fact that their agenda is more coherent and innovative than that of the Communists may lead to stronger support in future elections. United Russia's declining support

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<sup>63</sup> March, Luke. *Just Russia - From 'Second Leg' to 'Footnote'?* 26 September 2011. Russian Analytical Digest No. 102. Edinburgh, UK.

<sup>64</sup> Central Election Commission. *Preliminary results of the election of deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Sixth Convocation*. Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation. 2011. <[http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/2011/12/05/inf\\_cent\\_1.html](http://www.cikrf.ru/news/cec/2011/12/05/inf_cent_1.html)>.

<sup>65</sup> Sakwa, Richard. *Duma selection in The Crisis of Russian Democracy*. Chp. 7. 2011. Cambridge University Press, New York.

<sup>66</sup> March, Luke. *Just Russia - From 'Second Leg' to 'Footnote'?* 26 September 2011. Russian Analytical Digest No. 102. Edinburgh, UK.

is unlikely to have aided Mironov in March, however, as that erosion appears to have at least temporarily ceased to affect Putin, whose poll numbers rose throughout February to 66 percent.<sup>67</sup>

There will probably never be a President Mironov, and his unwillingness to more firmly criticize the party of power or even tacitly embrace the protests will limit his ability to become a leader of the opposition in the future. Yet he is a balanced, consistent party leader, whose organization offers a more moderate alternative to official other left-wing parties. As A Just Russia continues to absorb refugee votes from United Russia, Mironov may eventually find a niche in the opposition through his guidance of the party.

### **Mikhail Prokhorov, Independent**

Mikhail Prokhorov is one of two things: he is a billionaire oligarch and a Kremlin plant sent, like plenty before him, to funnel votes away from other opposition candidates, or he is a warrior for Russia's newly assertive middle class and the independent, liberal reformer for whom protesters have been waiting. As the only presidential hopeful to have appeared at recent opposition rallies, where he endorsed protestors' demands for free elections and political liberalization, and the only one to gather the 2 million signatures necessary to run as an independent (except the questionable circumstances surrounding Yavlinsky's petition), Prokhorov is almost too good to be true for Russia's hopeful liberal reformers. Though seemingly sincere in his candidacy, he is relatively unknown in the political world, which has encouraged speculation that his candidacy is another example of Putin's backroom chess politicking.

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<sup>67</sup> Martinez, Ken; Pfeifer, Ezekiel. *Putin Takes Commanding Lead in Poll*. Feb. 27, 2012. The Moscow Times. TheMoscowTimes.com. < <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-takes-commanding-lead-in-poll/453633.html>>.

As one of the richest men in Russia, with an estimated wealth of up to \$18 billion<sup>68</sup>, in a country where politics, wealth, and corruption are inexorably linked, Prokhorov's business empire is a cause for suspicion. Though having faced less controversy over his business dealings in the 1990s than fellow billionaire and opposition icon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, until recently the public has seen him as a playboy. Prokhorov has worked hard to downplay that image in his campaign, focusing on appearing intelligent and thoughtful, while driving home that he is a normal Muscovite (there is nothing more damning, in Russian politics, than to be considered non-Russian).

To that end, in the run-up to the election he released a pamphlet of stories describing his life as a smart and thrifty child of Moscow, began a question and answer blog on his website<sup>69</sup>, and promised via his sister, Irina, to start a family after winning the election<sup>70</sup>. She said, "Vote for Mikhail. Because [if he wins] he will certainly get married. After all, the country needs a first lady - and I need nieces and nephews<sup>71</sup>." In a nation faced with the crisis of a declining population, Prokhorov's bachelorhood is seen very negatively by the electorate, though drawing on family members like Irina may help improve his image. In early February, he even announced on Russian television his intention to donate \$17 billion of his \$18 billion fortune to charity upon winning the presidency<sup>72</sup>. Like most politicians, Prokhorov is working very hard to paint himself as the ordinary, hardworking, citizen for whom family is important and personal wealth is not.

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<sup>68</sup> Kramer, Andrew. *For Russia, a New Kind of Presidential Candidate: a Billionaire*. Feb. 20, 2012. New York Times. NYTimes.com. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/21/world/europe/mikhail-prokhorov-is-a-new-kind-of-russian-candidate-a-billionaire.html?ref=elections>>.

<sup>69</sup> MProkhorov.com. Official website of Mikhail Prokhorov. Russian; translated Feb. 21, 2012. <MProkhorov.com>.

<sup>70</sup> Gutterman, Steve. *Russian tycoon Prokhorov campaigns in Putin shadow*. March 1, 2012. Reuters.com US ed. Thomson Reuters. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/01/us-russia-election-prokhorov-idUSTRE82013L20120301>>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Khetani, Sanya. *Mikhail Prokhorov Has Promised To Donate His Billions To Charity If Elected Russian President*. Feb. 3, 2012. Business Insider, Europe. 2012 Business Insider Inc.

Whether these efforts signal a Prokhorov who has truly embraced a serious attitude towards public service and political reform, or simple spin doctoring, remains to be seen. There is certainly a basis to the argument that Prokhorov is not sincere in his new image or, as would be the case if he were a Kremlin plant, in his candidacy. Two weeks after announcing his bid for the presidency, while his staff was still gathering over 2 million signatures, the billionaire left for a French ski resort, Courchevel, where he owns a \$33 million mansion. Responding to questions about the prudence of the trip's timing, Prokhorov told *The Wall Street Journal* that such trips help present him as a refined candidate. "Where should Russia's next president come from? A village? The forest? The president needs to come from the elite."<sup>73</sup> This attitude, though prevalent among the candidates, suggests that the New York Nets owner is probably not as in touch with Russia's burgeoning middle class as he wants to appear.

At the very least, comments and actions like this have reinforced negative assumptions about Prokhorov's candidacy and political sincerity. When he was arrested on prostitution charges (which were later dropped) in Courchevel in 2007, prosecutor Xavier Richaud said that Prokhorov told police, "The parties, the girls, are my philosophy of life." Statements like these, combined with activities that clearly supported it, are Prokhorov's largest obstacles to becoming an important opposition politician. "He is rich, and for that the majority of Russians hate him a priori," explained Nikolai Petrov, political analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center<sup>74</sup>. Critics have interpreted his wealth and sudden political aspirations to signify that Prokhorov only entered the election at the behest of the Kremlin, in order to give the appearance of actual

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<[http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-02-03/europe/31020176\\_1\\_mikhail-prokhorov-anti-putin-russian-presidential-candidate](http://articles.businessinsider.com/2012-02-03/europe/31020176_1_mikhail-prokhorov-anti-putin-russian-presidential-candidate)>.

<sup>73</sup> Cullison, Alan; Gauthier-Villars, David. *Russian Candidate Embraces 'Elite'*. Feb. 29, 2012. *The Wall Street Journal Online*: US ed. Dow Jones & Company, Inc.

<<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204778604577243422129974812.html>>

<sup>74</sup> Gutterman, Steve. *Russian tycoon Prokhorov campaigns in Putin shadow*.

competition and ensure that no single opposition candidate would be able to capitalize on the entirety of the public's dissatisfaction with Putin<sup>7576</sup>.

If, however, he is sincere in trying to take a leading role in the opposition, Prokhorov is now saying and doing all of the right things to appeal to anti-Kremlin protesters. In addition to endorsing the protesters' demands for reform, and pledging to give up most of his wealth, he resigned the leadership of the liberal-leaning Right Cause Party after only a few months, declaring it a "puppet Kremlin party."<sup>77</sup> He has labeled Putin's stability as the road to Brezhnev-era stagnation, and his own willingness to make "unpopular decisions," that risk social and economic upheaval as a necessary peril. In an unusual move that will almost exclusively appeal to Russia's younger generation, Prokhorov has repeatedly stated that Russia must join Europe and reject the tradition of Russian exceptionalism, which he calls "its own 'special' fate," embraced by Putin, Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy, and most Russian politicians regardless of their ideology. "We need to decide once and for all that we are a part of greater Europe, and that we share the values of European democracies," he wrote in a January article in the Guardian. "Let us take our seat at the table of developed nations as a fully fledged partner, and choose the path of democratic development and respect for inalienable human rights that is our rightful heritage"<sup>78</sup>.

While this statement is politically risky for its total lack of nationalism, it could signify that Prokhorov is attempting to garner only fringe votes which may otherwise go to a single liberal candidate, which lends credence to the idea that he is a Kremlin plant. According to

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<sup>75</sup> Cullison, Alan; Gauthier-Villars, David. *Russian Candidate Embraces 'Elite'*.

<sup>76</sup> Parvaz, D. *Mikhail Prokhorov: 'Playing the long game'*. Feb. 26, 2012. Al Jazeera. <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/02/201221281424235478.html>>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Prokhorov, Mikhail. *Russia needs to change - but by evolution not revolution*. Jan. 11, 2012. The Guardian. Guardian.co.uk. Guardian News and Media Ltd. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/11/russia-needs-evolution-not-revolution>>

Petrov, this Euro-centric view of Russia (in contrast to the long Slavic/Russophilic tradition in art and politics) could serve a less sinister purpose, that of distinguishing Prokhorov significantly from his competitors. While Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy, and Mironov's nationalism pales in comparison to Putin's, Prokhorov refuses to fight on the incumbent's home turf. "The other candidates are all campaigning on populism, and they just cannot compete against Putin," said Petrov<sup>79</sup>.

Prokhorov's biggest advantage going into the election was his ability to differentiate himself from a field of official, party sponsored, candidates that often seem like carbon copies of each other. As the only first time presidential candidate on the ballot, his newness to Russian politics added to his appeal, despite the number of questions it raises about his legitimacy. Whether he is actually a Kremlin stalking horse candidate, or an honest and driven reformer, will depend on his political behavior over the next several years. His third place finish in the election indicates that some of the anti-Putin Russian electorate is ready to forgive Prokhorov for his privileged past. The fact that he did not receive even half as many votes as the aging Zyuganov shows that they still have some reservations about this politically-untested billionaire.

Prokhorov's popularity with the youngest generation of Russian voters is undeniable: leading up to the election, he regularly received four to five times the share of votes in online polls by Gazeta.ru than he received in traditional Levada Center and VTsIOM polling. All of the other candidates received approximately the same percentage in all three polls, on- or off-line.<sup>80,81</sup> This election provided him with an opportunity to present his political philosophy in

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<sup>79</sup> Gutterman, Steve. *Russian tycoon Prokhorov campaigns in Putin shadow*.

<sup>80</sup> Russian Public Opinion Research Center. *Revolution or Evolution? Russian Elections - 2012*. VTsIOM. Press Release No. 1410. <<http://wciom.com/index.php?id=61>>.

<sup>81</sup> Earle, Jonathan. *Candidate Profiles: Mikhail Prokhorov*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>.



opposition to an increasingly unpopular incumbent, something that is sure to aid his credibility as an opposition member and increase his viability as a future candidate.

If he truly intends on remaining in politics, Prokhorov's participation in this heavily slanted election was just the first move in a larger plan for the opposition's future. He has already laid out plans to start a new party based on "non-political principles," in order to "unite [Russian] civil society," across political divisions,<sup>82</sup> which he began to act on as soon as the election results were announced. Despite his long term aspirations, the candidate's political future remains uncertain. He could very well become one of, if not the most vital leaders of the opposition movement as older standbys like Zyuganov age and fade and a generation of youth that never lived in the USSR and more fully embraces Western-style democracy takes its place. It is just as likely, however, that like he will wind up in prison on politically-motivated charges, like the embattled Khodorkovsky, be kept from future ballots like Yavlinsky, or simply fade back into playboyism and bachelorhood. Until it is proven otherwise, observers will look to Prokhorov as the first of Russia's future generation of oppositionists, who may be able to turn Putin's stability into meaningful reform.

## **Unofficial Candidates**

### **Barred: The Healer, The Dummy, and The Veteran**

In the wide and unpredictable field of unofficial opposition candidates, three contenders attempted to participate in March's election but, for different reasons, were ultimately barred from running. These three have very little in common, but taken together the circumstances surrounding their ejection from the ballot provides a picture of the political maneuverings

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<sup>82</sup> Parvaz, D. *Mikhail Prokhorov: 'Playing the long game'*.

occurring around the mainstream candidates in the lead-up to the election, and their stories elucidate the tactics and strategic decisions of the current administration.

On her website, little-known presidential hopeful Svetlana Peunova decries the unfairness of her removal from the race for not having collected the requisite 2 million signatures. In early February, after the decision to exclude her was announced, she posted in the English section of her web site, "...if you are an oligarch, like Michael Prokhorov, and have enough money to fabricate those signatures, you are welcome to continue in the election race,"<sup>83</sup> The Russian language sections of the site have similar complaints about Russia's Central Election Commission (CEC), though she does not dispute being 1,757,000 signatures short.

Peunova aroused interest when she entered the race, but was quickly written off. She runs a folk medicine center and founded The Will, an unregistered party that claims 50,000 members and advocates more open elections with lower barriers to candidacy.<sup>84</sup> Her only real appeal was the fact that she was new, and unknown. This was immediately undercut by the perception of her folk center as a crazy cult, which was substantiated for most people by the group's belief that a reptilian race is riding a comet to earth to enslave humanity<sup>85</sup>. Peunova's early popularity, however brief, shows the appeal of new candidates to Russians dissatisfied with the status quo.

From the slightly more usual stock of political candidates came Dmitry Mezentsev, an unremarkable official who was appointed governor of Irkutsk in 2009. Not only did Mezentsev never have a chance of winning, the governor was nominated only to ensure at least one person

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<sup>83</sup> Peunova, Svetlana. *2.000.000 signatures or dollars. What will make you a president?* 11 Feb, 2012. <<http://svetlana.peunova.ru/eng/engvideo/725-2000sign>>.

<sup>84</sup> Official Political Program of The Will. Программа политической партии "Воля". July 4, 2009. Translated 2/12/12. <<http://volya-naroda.ru/program.html>>

<sup>85</sup> Krainova, Natalya. *Candidate Profiles: Svetlana Peunova*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>

would be running against Putin. His candidacy was sponsored by the East-Siberian Railway's labor union, part of Putin's All-Russia People's Front, "just in case," the other opposition candidates boycotted the election, according to a CEC official. Russian law does not allow a presidential candidate to run unopposed.<sup>86</sup>

Mezentsev's aborted candidacy was not unexpected, yet the most significant result of his removal from the ballot has been its use to justify the removal of Yabloko's candidate, Grigory Yavlinsky. When Yavlinsky protested his removal from the ballot, saying it was politically motivated, CEC officials and newspapers cited the Mezentsev removal to prove that they had not ousted Yavlinsky because of his anti-Kremlin politics or the threat he posed to Putin.

Had he been able to participate, Yavlinsky would have been assured a decent share of the moderate and left-wing vote, attracting a similar base of support as Prokhorov. Vladimir Milov, an opposition politician and president of the Institute of Energy Policy, a Moscow think-tank, said, "Yavlinsky is the most popular candidate among people with independent views."<sup>87</sup>

Yavlinsky's appeal of the CEC decision was dismissed February 8, only increasing speculation that his removal had been politically motivated. Left-leaning, intelligent, and reliable-seeming politicians like Prokhorov and Yavlinsky are generally liked in Western political circles, and their participation in an election helps legitimize it from the perspective of other democratic nations. But if Putin feared Yavlinsky enough to get him tossed off the ballot, why let Prokhorov stay?

Many observers have speculated that the Kremlin eliminated one in order to avoid a one-on-one runoff election between Putin and the most popular liberal, while he kept the other to

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<sup>86</sup> Interfax. *Problems with Yavlinsky signatures a surprise for Kremlin - Newspaper*. Jan. 24, 2012. Interfax Moscow, via Johnson's Russia List 2012 #13. CDI.org. <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/russia-yavlinsky-signatures-problem-surprised-kremlin-271.cfm>>.

<sup>87</sup> Bratersky, Alexander. *Candidate Profiles: Grigory Yavlinsky*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>.

legitimize the outcome of the vote. They contend that Yavlinsky's signatures were invalidated "so as to allow the main contender to gain more than 50% of the vote," and avoid a second round<sup>88</sup>. According to Nikolai Petrov, scholar in residence at the Carnegie Moscow Center, the added legitimacy of allowing both Prokhorov and Yavlinsky to run "would be an unaffordable luxury...if the Kremlin is banking on Putin winning during the first round of voting," he said.<sup>89</sup>

### **Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the Prisoner**

Once the richest man in Russia, having made fabulous amounts of wealth in the 1990s as head of the country's largest oil company, Yukos, Mikhail Khodorkovsky has been in prison for the last nine years on charges of fraud and embezzlement that many believe were politically motivated<sup>90</sup>. Due to be released in 2016, he is not on this year's ballot, nor has he stated any intention to run for president, yet Khodorkovsky is widely considered an important figure in the opposition movement with a strong political future, if he chooses it. Russia's most famous prisoner is not surrounded by the same motivational ambiguity as fellow liberal billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, having strongly condemned the Kremlin for years, but despite the respect he receives as an advocate of rapid reform many Russians continue to see him as an amoral, thieving oligarch.

Though he has no official political platform, Khodorkovsky has laid out his ideology over several years of letters and articles written from prison. These articles are usually personal accounts of his jail time, trial, and the operations of the government against him, and he often veils the substance of his argument behind artful, didactic language. More concretely, he wrote a

<sup>88</sup> Rodin, Ivan. *The bets have been made*. Jan. 25, 2012. *Nezaviximaya Gazeta*. Russian Press Digest, No. 125a. <<http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/26514668>>.

<sup>89</sup> Petrov, Nikolai. *Once an Alpha Dog, Always an Alpha Dog*. Jan. 12, 2012. *The Moscow Times*. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/once-an-alpha-dog-always-an-alpha-dog/450945.html>>.

<sup>90</sup> Aron, Leon. *The YUKOS Affair*. 2003. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy. IEP.ru. <<http://www.iep.ru/files/text/guest/Aron/yukos.pdf>>

proposal in 2005 for a 12-year modernization and liberalization plan, though even this is more high-minded and theoretical than many other opposition members' proposals. For example, even as he describes "the Russian political elite's parasitic cast of mind,"<sup>91</sup> his accusations of the current government still avoid anything overt about his own political intentions.

In a 2004 work titled *Property and Freedom* he wrote, "Naturally, I would like to make a contribution to making Russia free and prosperous, but I am also ready to be tolerant if the government decides I must stay in jail."<sup>92</sup> Khodorkovsky's strongest move in establishing himself as a guide for the fledgling opposition has been to adopt this calm, reasoned tone, explaining his issues with Russian politics in a logical, careful way through his writing.

"[Prison] afforded me several months of space for contemplation and a reassessment of many aspects of life," he wrote in *Property*, emphasizing that prison has helped him become a more outspoken and thoughtful political observer. These sentiments are aimed at publicly reconciling his past as a billionaire who did not speak out against the establishment for fear of his property (Yukos), with his current aspirations for the opposition. "I did not permit myself to say many things, since open thoughts could threaten the property," he wrote, "This is a manifestation of a powerful tyranny - the tyranny of property."<sup>93</sup> With no immediate, explicit pretension for office, Khodorkovsky's writing has a strong quality of honesty, which is reinforced by his quiet eloquence, though through it he assuredly is laying the groundwork for his future political aspirations.

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<sup>91</sup> Khodorkovsky, Mikhail. *Left Turn 2: Левый поворот-2*. Nov. 11, 2005. *Kommersant*. No. 212 (3296). *Kommersant* Publishing House. Translated 2/29/12. <<http://www.Kommersant.ru/doc/625520>>

<sup>92</sup> Khodorkovsky, Mikhail. *Property and Freedom; Собственность и свобода*. Dec. 12, 2004. Press Center of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, 2011. Translated 2/19/12. <[http://khodorkovsky.ru/mbk/articles\\_and\\_interview/2004/12/28/12297.html](http://khodorkovsky.ru/mbk/articles_and_interview/2004/12/28/12297.html)>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Khodorkovsky, now free of his burdensome property, has no problem speaking openly in this inward looking, meditative way. He is much more of a philosopher than any official candidate - even the similarly minded Prokhorov sounds consistently like the business-minded energy mogul in comparison. "Developing the self, together with feelings, ideas, abilities, will, reason and faith are the only things that matter," he wrote. "Such an understanding leads to the only possible and correct choice, the choice of freedom."<sup>94</sup> His high-minded reasoning, evident intelligence, and liberal ideals have positioned him well as a guide and inspiration to the opposition movement, even while in prison.

Khodorkovsky's other great strength is one he shares with Putin - he is genuinely unafraid of speaking boldly on issues that Russians hold very close. Of course, unlike Putin, he is far more likely to criticize Russophilic tendencies. In a 2004 article titled *The Crisis of Russia's Liberalism*, Khodorkovsky openly advocated the Europeanization of Russia, and made a logical, sound and, traditionalists would say, absolutely unconscionable argument that Russia's self-image and fundamental conception of liberalism must change. "In order to change this country, we must ourselves change. In order to convince Russia of the need and the inevitability of liberal development, we must overcome fears from the previous decade, and from the dreary history of Russian liberalism," he concluded. "For freedom to return to Russia, we must start believing in it ourselves."<sup>95</sup>

Evgeny Gontmakher at the Institute for Modern Development notably referred to Khodorkovsky as the "moral authority," of the Russian opposition<sup>96</sup>. Khodorkovsky will

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Khodorkovsky, Mikhail. *The Crisis of Liberalism in Russia; Кризис либерализма в России*. March 29, 2004. Press Center of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, 2011. Translated 2/25/12. <[http://khodorkovsky.ru/mbk/articles\\_and\\_interview/2004/03/29/12296.htm](http://khodorkovsky.ru/mbk/articles_and_interview/2004/03/29/12296.htm)>

<sup>96</sup> Odynova, Alexandra. *Candidate Profiles: Mikhail Khodorkovsky*. The Moscow Times. Feb. 20, 2012. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/candidate-profiles/453332.html>>

undoubtedly continue in this role if, for no other reason, than to continue to protest his own imprisonment. There is more than this behind his writing, however, and his ability to passionately and calmly explain problems in Russian society in an approachable way will allow him to serve as this "moral" guide for the opposition. Whether he chooses to take a more direct role in politics when he is released is uncertain; any mention of it on his part now would almost certainly result in a third conviction and term extension before his intended release. He would be comfortable as a candidate, and many observers expect and hope he will pursue such a role. If he can successfully shake his oligarch past and convince Russians that his conception of liberalism is the truest and best for Russia, Khodorkovsky will undoubtedly emerge as a prominent opposition leader and intellectual upon his release.

### **Russia: Questions of the Next 6 Years**

In order to examine how the Russian political landscape will change over the course of Putin's third term, it is necessary to examine how Putin and United Russia, the parliamentary opposition, and the unofficial opposition are likely respond to the fundamental issues that Russia will face over the next six years - party system reform, the rise of the middle class, and relations with the West. A thorough examination of the strategies that these individuals and parties will employ in the fight over these three issues, described briefly below, will elucidate the force each is likely to exert on the evolution of Russian politics.

#### *Party System Reform*

Immediately after the election a set of addendums to the Law on Political Parties, which defines the criteria for establishing parties and the minimum standards for receiving Duma representation, was adopted by the State Duma to ease the registration of political

organizations<sup>97</sup>. The law, which was proposed by Medvedev after the controversy of December's Duma election, went into force when he signed it on April 4<sup>th</sup>. Though the law only explicitly impacts parliamentary elections, current Russian law requires any party without Duma representation to take additional steps in order to register presidential candidates<sup>98</sup>, meaning that this law will have significant impact on future presidential elections as well.

Under the new rules, the membership requirement to register a new party has been reduced by 800 percent, from 45,000 people to 500. Additionally, the law abolishes the requirement that parties collect voter signatures in order to participate in Duma elections<sup>99</sup>. Though easing restrictions on party formation will undoubtedly result in a more pluralistic ballot for the next Duma elections, many opposition members are worried that the law will only result in a more chaotic and Kremlin-slanted political environment. The following section will examine the hopes and concerns surrounding this new law, as well as how different political groups will use it, to determine what impact it will have on Russia's future political makeup.

### *The Rise of the Middle Class*

Just five days after the election, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who served on the National Security Council as the Soviet and East European affairs advisor to President George H.W. Bush during the dissolution of the USSR, penned a thoughtful editorial in the Washington Post describing the role she envisioned for a politically active, urban Russian middle class. "This [election] victory may be both Putin's last and the final one for Putinism," she wrote. "The future turns on the behavior of a rising Russian middle class that is integrated into the

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<sup>97</sup> ITAR-TASS. *State Duma adopts in second reading addendums to law on political parties*. Russian Press Review. 21 March, 2012. <<http://www.itar-tass.com/en/c142/371396.html>>

<sup>98</sup> Herszenhorn, David M. *Russia to ease law on forming political parties*. 24 March, 2012. The New York Times. 2012 The New York Times Company. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/world/europe/russia-eases-law-on-political-parties.html>>

<sup>99</sup> Korolyov, Alexei. *Medvedev Signs Party Registration Bill*. 3 April 2012. RIA Novosti. RIAN.ru. <<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20120403/172576418.html>>.



world and alienated by the Kremlin's corrupt politics<sup>100</sup>." Rice sees the growth of the middle class as the key to realizing the "New Dream," scenario.

Rice's outlook follows the logic of Motroshilova, in that the middle class' expectations for the future will be based on more on civilizational aspects of democracy than security or ideological concerns. As Rice wrote, for the first time there is a significant class of Russians who "own their own apartments, furnish them at Ikea and spoil their children at McDonalds"<sup>101</sup>." The voting behavior of the urban middle class will be determined more by their desire to provide comfortable lives for themselves and their families than by fears of chaotic liberalism or repressive authoritarianism, as has usually been the case in Russia. For them, stress over the reality of day-to-day life and the challenge of rising through the middle class are far more tangible than abstract ideas on possible directions for their "sovereign democracy"<sup>102</sup>." The following section will examine the relationship between the urban middle class and Russia's political factions. Through this relationship, it is possible to analyze in whom the middle class will place their vital support and how that support will influence the development of Russian politics.

### *Russia and the West*

Finally, in order to examine any of Melville and Timofeev's scenarios, it is vital to first discuss the impact each political faction will have on the relationship between Russia and the

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<sup>100</sup> Rice, Condoleezza. *The promise of Russia's urban middle class*. 8 March, 2012. The Washington Post. Washingtonpost.com. <[http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-russias-urban-middle-class-can-bring-an-end-to-putinism/2012/03/08/gIQA1FL1zR\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-russias-urban-middle-class-can-bring-an-end-to-putinism/2012/03/08/gIQA1FL1zR_story.html)>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Motroshilova, N.V. *We Need to Elaborate More Boldly the Civilizational Aspects of Democracy*. 2009. Russian Studies in Philosophy, vol. 47, no. 4, Spring 2009. pp. 33-44. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.

West. Each of their scenarios is based partially on the future state of international relations<sup>103</sup>; while it is beyond the scope of this analysis to provide a full portrait of global politics over a six year period, it is possible to examine with what force and direction the political groups and personalities described above will try to influence Russia's relationship with the international community.

While the most visible conflict in Russian politics is the dramatic showdown between the regime (Putin, Medvedev, United Russia and its allies) and every other party and candidate, the debate over whether Russia should pursue a European or its own Slavic path is much more integral to Russian self-perception and underlies many larger socio-political issues. This debate goes back at least to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has been fought in the realms of art, literature, politics, and civil society<sup>104</sup>. The political sides in the debate today do not follow the same lines as Putin vs. Everyone: two parties, Yabloko and Right Cause, were emblematic of the Westernizer perspective last December, and in March that view was touted primarily by Prokhorov. In December United Russia, the KPRF, and the LDPR, and in March Putin, Zyuganov and Zhirinovskiy, adamantly espoused the nationalist, Russia-centric worldview in their rhetoric<sup>105</sup>. As Russian politics become more pluralistic with the implementation of new party regulations, this argument will increase in prominence and exert significant pressure on Russia's relationship with the world.

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<sup>103</sup> Melville, Andrei; Timofeev, Ivan. *Russia 2020: Alternative Scenarios and Public Preferences*. Russian Politics and Law, vol. 47, no. 6, November-December 2009. pp. 7-33. 2009 M.E. Sharpe, Inc. ISSN: 1061-1940/2009.

<sup>104</sup> Hosking, Geoffrey. *Slavophiles and Westernizers in Russia*. Valdai Discussion Club. 21 March, 2012. Valdaiclub.com. 3/28/12.

<sup>105</sup> Korgunyuk, Yuriy. *Russia seen at 'crossroads' of European, Soviet paths of development*. 13 March, 2012. Indem Foundation. via Gazeta.ru.

### Putin 3.0

The debate over the nature of Putin's third, some would say fourth, term began long before the election and shows no signs of dying down. Even more contentious than the dispute over the value and health of the system he created during his first two terms, the arguments over Putin's ability and will to enact the reforms he has promised and whether those reforms will be healthy for Russian society have overwhelmed the post-election news coverage and scholarly analysis. Through an analysis of expert opinion and Putin's own actions regarding the above three core political issues (new party legislation, the rising middle class, and West-Russia relations) it is possible to cut through the pundits' often hyperbolic arguments and realistically analyze how the once and future president's unmatched clout will impact political development.

The return to laws on political parties similar to those that existed in 2003, before Putin amended them to consolidate his control over parliament, is on the surface a move towards more open, pluralistic representation. Yet the new legislation will not simply help Putin's democratic image, but structurally improve the odds of the consolidated party of power (currently United Russia) in future Duma elections. Before his 2003 reforms, Russia had over 130 political parties; afterwards there were just 50. In 2004, parties were first required to have at least 50,000 members, precipitating the drop to today's seven official parties. At the time, this consolidated the party of power's influence in the Duma. With the revocation of these standards, and over 70 organizations already having applied for party status with the Ministry of Justice, Putin's field of competitors - and supporters - will assuredly be much more diverse in his third term.

According to a high-profile 2011 report by the Centre for Strategic Studies, the popularity of United Russia and current authorities will continue to fall throughout Putin's next term. The victories of Putin and the party in December and March, the report argued, risked future de-

legitimization of the party of power<sup>106</sup>. Because of this, the coming pluralization of political parties will make it easier for new parties to be formed with the administration's blessing who, circumventing the negative image of United Russia, could channel votes towards Putin and his policies. It is still unclear whether parties represented in the Duma will be permitted to form coalitions; if this continues to be prohibited, the opposition will be unable to channel votes to a specific set of opposition candidates, greatly favoring the large, state-funded parties. More surreptitiously the new party laws will allow the creation of "killer parties." Head of the Analysis Department for the independent Center for Political Technologies Tatyana Stanovaya, explained that these pseudo-opposition parties' policies "will be directed toward discrediting the real oppositionists<sup>107</sup>." As Peunova's failed campaign and Zhirinovsky's aggressive rhetoric demonstrated, inflammatory and insane oppositionists make good headlines. By inflaming the opposition's rhetoric and intentionally alienating voters, such parties could easily weaken the influence and legitimacy of the opposition in Russians' eyes.

Putin has already begun to connect himself with parties other than United Russia. At the beginning of April, he recommended that the All-Russian Popular Front (ONF), which he heads, be granted the status of a "public organization," meaning that it is likely to emerge as a second "party of power" along with United Russia. Because Putin is not a member of either party, he would be able to use both of them to promote his policies to different parts of the electorate, and spread his support for candidates between the two in order to avoid tying his political fate too closely to any one organization.

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<sup>106</sup> Belanovsky, Sergei; Dmitriev, Mikhail. *Политический кризис в России и возможные механизмы его развития*. 2011. Center for Strategic Development, Moscow. <<http://www.leontief-centre.ru/UserFiles/Files/politkrizis.doc>>.

<sup>107</sup> Stanovaya, Tatyana. *Reform of Russia's party system: back to the 90s?* 19 March, 2012. Center for Political Technologies. CPT.ru. <<http://www.cpt.ru/english.php>>.

As Putin seeks to distance himself from United Russia, leaving the party largely in the hands of Medvedev<sup>108</sup>, a larger role for the ONF is aimed at diminishing the importance of any single party. It is far from clear how Putin intends this maneuvering to shape Russia's future political structure, but the potential for the law to benefit his power in the Duma is undeniable. If the new parliamentary opposition is unable to focus its efforts and avoid the influence of distracting pseudo-oppositionists, the new laws will undoubtedly benefit the party of power. Putin gambled by reducing the barriers to parliamentary representation, hoping that the proliferation of parties will lend him legitimacy and further control over Russian politics. If his gamble pays off, the Russian political environment will continue to expand in diversity, but will remain dominated by Putinism, sovereign democracy, and a weak, squabbling opposition.

Regarding the middle class, Putin is oblivious to neither their existence nor importance, although his policy efforts to address their political demands are likely to be less evident than his counterparts'. In the pre-election op-ed in Kommersant, Putin wrote about the rising urban middle class, "People are becoming more affluent, educated and demanding. The results of our efforts are new demands on the government and the advance of the middle class above the narrow objective of guaranteeing their own prosperity<sup>109</sup>." Putin clearly recognizes that the middle class will only increase its demands for a more responsive government and greater participation in public policy formation. He is also extremely sensitive to public opinion, especially on social policy, and will avoid unpopular measures such as raising the retirement age. That sensitivity does not extend to genuine expansion of the policy-making elites. The continued dominance of "sovereign democracy" as his core view of Russian politics, which was

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<sup>108</sup> ITAR-ITASS. *The second ruling party may grow from Putin's All-Russian Popular Front*. 4 April, 2012. Russian Press Review.

<sup>109</sup> Putin, Vladimir. *Democracy and the quality of government*. 6 Feb. 2012. Kommersant. Via Government of the Russian Federation. <<http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/18006/>> . Translation via Kommersant 2/17/12.

demonstrated in his editorials and speeches during the campaign, makes it unlikely that he will truly allow the public a greater share of real power.

In the election, Putin demonstrated that he was willing to allow more freedom of expression on political matters; the number of experts and columnists freely questioning his waning popularity was entirely unprecedented, and improved his image, as demonstrated by his rising approval rating since the December election. Yet as with the new party laws, this new freedom still exists within the bounds of the executive's control; despite numerous promises, none of his proposed is likely to give the public greater control over policy<sup>110</sup>. Voices and alternative opinions will proliferate more than in his previous terms, but through the ingrained vertical power system that he built, Putin will be able to maintain the dominant narrative and the largest share of real power over policy formation and implementation. Through this marginal expansion of political freedoms, the promotion of specific popular social policy items and continued nationalist rhetoric, Putin will be able to keep some of the Russian middle class on his side.

Concerning Putin's future foreign policy, experts are generally agreed that Putin will not liberalize his foreign policy or adopt a more positive rhetoric toward the West. At best, they estimate his attitude will remain the same as it was during his first two terms; at worst, some fear he will escalate his nationalist and anti-Western rhetoric in order to bolster the argument for his sovereign democracy<sup>111,112</sup>. In order to accurately assess to what degree Putin will actively

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<sup>110 110</sup> Putin, Vladimir. *Democracy and the quality of government*. 6 Feb. 2012. Kommersant. Via Government of the Russian Federation. <<http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/18006/>> . Translation via Kommersant 2/17/12.

<sup>111</sup> Belaeff, Vladimir; Krickus, Dick; Lozansky, Edward; Petro, Nicolai. *Russia Profile Weekly Experts Panel: Putin's New Old Foreign Policy*. Mod. Vladimir Frolov. 12 March, 2012. RussiaProfile.org. <[http://russiaprofile.org/experts\\_panel/55697.html](http://russiaprofile.org/experts_panel/55697.html)>.

<sup>112</sup> Meyer, Henry. *Putin design for Russia may intensify tensions with West*. 7 March, 2012. Bloomberg.

confront the West, it is best to examine the expert's analysis in light of Putin's foreign policy goals that will undoubtedly clash with American and European goals.

In his pre-election editorial on foreign policy, Putin made it very clear when and why he would stand up to the West. He will continue to vehemently criticize the American and European intervention in Middle East uprisings, like Libya and Syria, which he called "political engineering," and "outright demagoguery." On long-simmering issues like NATO enlargement and missile defense programs, he will continue to argue that the United States is pursuing "absolute invulnerability," and in doing so is disregarding legitimate Russian concerns about such threats to geopolitical stability. This rhetoric will continue to rely on the zero sum assumption that increases in American security apparatuses and projected power inevitably make other states less powerful and more vulnerable, and will be used to define and defend Russia's unique path of development<sup>113</sup>. This conflict is likely to push the Russian view of international relations towards the Kremlin Gambit and Fortress Russia scenarios.

Some of his promises, however, show areas where Putin will push Russia toward greater integration with the West, though not necessarily in ways that will ease tensions. For example, he proposed greater economic integration with the European Union to create a "common European energy complex...from Lisbon to Vladivostok."<sup>114</sup> Though Western leaders would hail greater economic cooperation, in the general sense, the idea of an "energy complex," would remind them of repeated disputes between Russia and Ukraine over oil supplies. Most recently in 2009, state-owned Gazprom cut off the gas supply to their neighbor<sup>115</sup>; the event continues to fuel fears that Russia would be too unreliable and demanding as a major energy provider. This

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<sup>113</sup> Putin, Vladimir. *Russia and the Changing World*. RIA Novosti. Feb. 27, 2012. EN.RIAN.ru. World Edition. <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120227/171547818.html>>.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Gow, David. *Russia-Ukraine gas crisis intensifies as all European supplies are cut off*. 7 January, 2009. The Guardian. Guardian.co.uk. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/jan/07/gas-ukraine>>.

international distrust will be mitigated by efforts in the US to improve public perception of U.S.-Russian relations, notably by Ambassador McFaul and a concerted effort by the Obama Administration to prevent the West's rhetoric from encouraging a Fortress Russia scenario. However, should the public debate on one of these topics escalate, whichever side accuses the other, it will make Russia more likely to view itself as a fortress surrounded by international condemnation and threatened by global conflicts.

A significant factor in the effect of Putin's foreign policy is his position on national security. In his editorial on defense, he gave the strongest evidence that he may push the country towards the Fortress scenario. He pledged to continue to modernize the Russian military with 23 trillion rubles (approximately \$770 billion) and to project its power abroad through naval patrols, particularly in energy-important regions. Using the example of the surprise Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941, conflicts in Russia's geopolitical sphere such as the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and of course NATO involvement in Libya, Putin argues that Russia will be exploited by outside powers if it shows any sign of weakness. If, in Putin's perspective, the international political environment becomes more chaotic, he is very likely to cite national security concerns in pushing Russia towards the insular Fortress model of dealing with the world.

Ultimately Putin is unlikely to advocate stronger ties with international legal institutions, like the UN. He believes only the UN has a right to permit international intervention, though this is most often used to decry unilateral U.S. or NATO actions; he will never assert, however, that the UN or any other organization is more essential to the peaceful functioning of international relations than "the time-honored principle of state sovereignty"<sup>116</sup>. Putin would be amenable to the world order of the New Dream scenario, in that he would embrace strong, well-regulated

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<sup>116</sup> Putin, Vladimir. *Russia and the Changing World*. RIA Novosti. Feb. 27, 2012. EN.RIAN.ru. World Edition. <<http://en.rian.ru/world/20120227/171547818.html>>.



international legal institutions that keep global conflict to a minimum and respect his definition of Russia's sovereignty. However, his realist worldview and focus on national defense do not permit him to embrace these institutions immediately or constructively help them become the effective institutions presented in the "New Dream" scenario. It will take a leader of greater faith in the international community to trust Russian security to the UN. As long as Russia tries to solve its own security problems, Putin will advocate a buildup of Russia's military-industrial complex, which will alienate the West.

It is most likely, barring a decrease in regional stability, Putin will push Russia towards the Kremlin Gambit scenario, which depends on Russia remaining and growing as an energy providing nation. This scenario best reconciles Putin's begrudging acceptance of international organizations with his vehement assertions of the superiority of sovereignty. If the price of oil drops and regional global conflict increases, Putin's militaristic response to regional conflicts will make Russia more protective, causing the West, which has given up hope for democratic development, to return to the cold-war mentality of the Fortress Russia scenario.

### **The New Opposition**

Thanks to the new legislation on parties, the official opposition in Russia will expand more over the next six years than it has since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In this newly pluralistic system, there is high potential for friction between the myriad opposition parties, some of which will undoubtedly be created solely to fuel discord, which will de-legitimize the opposition and funnel votes toward Putin and his allied parties. For the purpose of this analysis, it is necessary to examine the extent, direction, and cumulative effect of the force each element of the new opposition will exert on policy matters.

### *The Old Guard*

The greatest benefit for the current official Russian political parties from the imminent influx of parliamentary opposition will be the impetus it creates for them to fully modernize their platforms and choose leaders in whom the Russian electorate will have more confidence. Despite their better-than-expected showings in December, the current parliamentary parties continue to be seen as out of date and unable to meet the needs of Russia's newly politicized middle class; a fact of which they are acutely aware<sup>117</sup>. Their December victories are most often attributed to the public's newfound distaste for one-party rule, not to confidence in the officially recognized parties' platforms and candidates<sup>118</sup>.

Though Zyuganov came in second in this election, support for him and the KPRF continues to come mainly from a shrinking pool of older voters<sup>119</sup>. With his rhetoric virtually unchanged in the last 15 years, he has shown no proficiency at appealing to younger voters, as shown in his inability and unwillingness to capitalize on the anger of the protesters. Despite the efforts of the party to modernize its platform, Zyuganov will always be the face of the KPRF and it will be closely identified with his message. Without replacing Zyuganov, and implementing a serious restructuring of the party to make it viable in the new Russian parliament, the Communist Party will be an ineffective instrument for opposing the Kremlin or encouraging socialist policy.

The need for drastic reform is even more vital for the LDPR, whose leader Zhirinovskiy is more controversial and inflammatory than Zyuganov. If they can successfully replace their leader with someone more appealing to the public who can organize the party around realistic

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<sup>117</sup> BBC Monitoring. *Russian Communist Party needs rebranding, members say*. 31 March, 2012. Ekho Moskvyy Radio. via Johnson's Russia List at CDI.org.

<sup>118</sup> Bratersky, Alexander. *Time is running out for political veterans*. 7 March, 2012. The Moscow Times. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/mobile/article/time-is-running-out-for-political-veterans/454254.html>>.

<sup>119</sup> Grove, Thomas. *Communist Kremlin hopeful looks to a new generation*. 2 March, 2012. Reuters US Edition. Thomson Reuters. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/02/us-russia-election-communist-idUSTRE8210EJ20120302>>

policy measures rather than slogans like "Russia for Russians," the LDPR will be able to influence the predicted influx of nationalist parties over the next six years and maintain prominence among them<sup>120</sup>. An updated platform would allow the LDPR to be inclusive of these new parties and operate in a voting bloc of nationalist parties that would gain support among voters without abandoning the core principles of their platform. However, even a comprehensive overhaul of nationalist parties would be unlikely to sway the new liberal urbanites towards the extreme rhetoric LDPR or the Communists. Additionally, after 15 years of sameness, the likelihood of drastic, policy-based reform of these parties by their leaders or members is unlikely to take place.

On foreign relations, the goals and rhetoric of these two parties and any nationalist voting blocs they create in the Duma will undoubtedly push Russia towards the Kremlin Gambit or Fortress Russia scenarios. Though they are likely to embrace those outlooks in more extreme ways than Putin, their lack of real power in foreign policy decisions, a feature of Putin's vertical power integration, means their impact on the international situation will pale compared with his.

Without the legitimacy of strong past electoral showings, or at the very least an attention-grabbing leader, A Just Russia is likely to fade away in the influx of new parties. Even with an updated platform and restructuring of the party, Mironov's abysmal showing in March drove home that he and his party have little place in the future Russian opposition. However, until the next Duma elections in 2016, A Just Russia's parliamentary representation will give them influence while the new parties are being formed and begin making alliances. Because they are already represented and have the most members of any party other than United Russia, newly formed left-wing parties have reason to gravitate around A Just Russia. Through active

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<sup>120</sup> Shestopal, Yelena. *The Bottom Line in Russian expert sees role for nationalist party within country's political system*. 27 March, 2012. [Kommersant.ru](http://kommersant.ru).

participation in the formation and promotion of new liberal opposition parties, A Just Russia has unique potential to focus the opposition and help prevent its descent into small, bickering factions. If it cannot secure this niche, which it will have to compete for against Prokhorov and his new party, A Just Russia will most likely dissolve as its 400,000 supporters flock to more viable and influential parties.

Regardless of their political leanings, all of the represented opposition parties are faced with a need to prove that they can effectively represent the needs of a middle-class which didn't exist when their political careers began. It will be easy, as this new landscape takes shape, for voters to write off the current opposition as weak and outdated if they continue to tout the policies and leaders of the last fifteen years. As happened after the passage of 2003 party laws, parties will be formed, broken up, and combined in new ways over the next six years. If managed wisely, A Just Russia could use this shakeup to take a central role in the liberal opposition; either the LDPR or KPRF could use it to capitalize on growing nationalist sentiments and create a nationalist platform to rival Putin's. Past behavior indicates, however, that all three parties will make these changes reluctantly and slowly. Without significant and immediate change, the formerly-unofficial opposition will enter the Duma as a more credible political force, and the old parties will cease to be seen as legitimate.

### *The New Parliamentary Opposition*

Of the over 70 parties already signaling their intent to become official under the new laws, the as-yet-unnamed party that is being formed by Prokhorov has generated the most interest. With his third place finish in the presidential race, Prokhorov made it clear that he can channel the anger and frustrations of young and middle-class voters into political action, making it likely that his party will be at the center of the opposition by the 2016 Duma elections. Despite

this, many politicians are still unsure whether or not he will capitalize on his showing in the race, which political scientist Boris Makarenko accurately called "his pass into big-time politics"<sup>121</sup>."

Doubts remain among many experts, including Head of the International Institute for Political Expertise Evgeny Minchenko, about his commitment to politics.<sup>122</sup> Even Boris Nemtsov of the similarly-aligned liberal People's Freedom Party has expressed concerns; "I do not think that Prokhorov is ready for alliances or coalitions," said Nemtsov. "He believes foolishly that his participation in the presidential election and performance in it gives him priority over all others"<sup>123</sup>." The biggest fear for other oppositionists is that Prokhorov's celebrity image will hinder his ability and will to put the needs of a party and a liberal parliamentary coalition first; if that fear is true, his presence will only add to the discord of over-pluralism.

If Prokhorov is able to work with a coalition of reformers, his presence and charisma will help it garner the votes of large portions of the middle class. He has shown that, in such a position, he will argue for democratization, greater engagement with the West and international institutions, and reform of social policy to reflect the needs of the urban middle class. Prokhorov is untested on issues of international security, however, and if conflict were to erupt in the region after he and his party gained prominence, their Westernizing influence on foreign policy would be blamed by supporters of sovereign democracy for failing to prioritize Russian interests. No matter what, he will be a lightning rod in any debate on the emerging opposition, and though he has the potential to attract oppositionists, his unproven record runs the risk of confirming to the

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<sup>121</sup> Tirmaste, Maria-Louise. *Prokhorov climbed higher, Experts: Prokhorov's performance in the presidential election became his pass into big-time politics*. 6 March, 2012. [Kommersant](http://kommersant.ru). [Kommersant.ru](http://kommersant.ru).

<sup>122</sup> Minchenko, Evgeny et al. *How will Prokhorov convert his political ratings?* 7 March 2012. Panel Discussion, Russia Beyond the Headlines. [Rbth.ru](http://rbth.ru).

<sup>123</sup> Tirmaste, Maria-Louise. *Prokhorov climbed higher, Experts: Prokhorov's performance in the presidential election became his pass into big-time politics*. 6 March, 2012. [Kommersant](http://kommersant.ru). [Kommersant.ru](http://kommersant.ru).

public Putin's argument that liberalization and acceptance of the Western example will preempt a return to the instability of the 1990s.

Grigory Yavlinsky lacks Prokhorov's youth and newness, but the current Yabloko member is still seen as a prominent, intelligent, liberal politician. Because his party has failed to receive the minimum percentage of the vote to be represented in the Duma in every election since 2003, it is very likely that he will take advantage of new legislation to rebuild it to take advantage of the new political landscape and demands of voters. Though the parliamentary elections show voter fatigue with his party, it is not clear if the public is similarly weary of Yavlinsky. Though he has been in politics since the 1990s, his less caustic rhetoric and lack of participation in recent elections may spare him from being viewed as out of touch, like Zyuganov or Zhirinovskiy.

Like Prokhorov, Yavlinsky will expressly promote the needs of the middle class. In an article published about a month after the election, he subtly asserted his advantage with that group over both Putin and Prokhorov. In *Separating Power from Property*, Yavlinsky sets forth a proposal to compensate Russians for the "shady" business deals of future-Oligarchs in the 1990s that created "a great sense of injustice that remains for society from the memory of 'big privatization.'" His argument is primarily an eloquent counter-proposal to Putin's suggested privatization tax, and appeals to Russia's new reformers by advocating a law on the "normalization of the relationship between business and government, and most importantly, their separation from each other," which includes transparency laws on lobbying and party financing, as well as "an independent national public television, which does not now exist in Russia"<sup>124</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> Yavlinsky, Grigory. *Отделить власть от собственности*. 2 April, 2012. Ведомости. Vedomosti.ru. <[http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1588231/otdelit\\_vlast\\_ot\\_sobstvennosti](http://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/news/1588231/otdelit_vlast_ot_sobstvennosti)>

Each of these proposals echoes demands of the rising middle class, and shows his ability to intelligently craft policy around them.

The article presents Yavlinsky's advantage over Prokhorov much more delicately, though it was never truly a secret: Yavlinsky was never an Oligarch. "The issue is much broader than the assessment of the legal correctness of...privatization deals of the 1990s," he wrote. "The problem is that most of our delegates in the list of 'Forbes' are one way or another billionaires and 'captains of Russian business,' and no matter what anyone says, deep down, everyone understands that they don't name the owner-proprietor but the manager<sup>125</sup>." If voters agree that Prokhorov is the "manager," a figurehead with wealth and prominence, while Yavlinsky is the "owner," hardworking and involved in the details of management, it may give Yavlinsky enough of a boost to compete with the reformed Oligarch's recent popularity.

Regardless of which man may become a more vital opposition leader, both Yavlinsky and Prokhorov are likely to cooperate on the vast majority of issues and pool the resources of their parties. Between them, the new opposition will have two well-regarded leaders - one with more charisma, one with the reputation of a credible opposition veteran. Through joint efforts by their parties, support of the same party, or other kinds of cooperation, the two would be able to speak authoritatively on middle class issues and advocate democratic reforms more effectively than either individual. Though their real influence over policy, like that of every opposition element, is severely limited by Putin's structural control of Russian politics, each of these men is likely in the next six years to rally the middle class around issues of social and democratic reform, and advocate greater cooperation with the West and international institutions.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

*Decline of the Illicit Opposition, Rise of the Independent*

In the wake of the election, it has become clear that with greater inclusion of small political parties in the Duma and a lack of catalyzing electioneering by the Kremlin, the anger of the Russian protest movement is being channeled away from street demonstrations into the halls of government. The protests have gradually decreased in frequency and attendance, making Putin's gamble that greater inclusion will diminish illicit opposition likely to succeed as young former-demonstrators rally around new official parties<sup>126</sup>. Some of them, however, have found ways to be more directly, if less prominently, involved in Russia's political future. A slate of young candidates, many of them who proudly admit to participating in the protests, won small elections for neighborhood council seats in Moscow and St. Petersburg, typically the domain of aging former-Soviet councilmen<sup>127</sup>, and independent candidates won mayoral races against established, well funded United Russia Candidates.

In one of the most surprising upsets the United Russia-sponsored mayoral candidate for mayor in the city of Yaroslavl, the administrative center of Yaroslavl Oblast just 150 miles northeast of Moscow, was defeated by the independent Yevgeny Urlashov. Despite the huge funding disparity because of Urlashov's lack of official party backing and his opponent's considerable financial support from United Russia and the state, the newcomer bested his opponent with 70 percent of the vote in an early April runoff election<sup>128</sup>. In Tolyatti, a large industrial city on the Volga River sometimes called the "Russian Detroit", self-nominated psychologist Sergei Andreyev bested the Kremlin-sponsored Alexander Shakhov in the runoff

<sup>126</sup> Roth, Andrew. *Lost in the Crowd: Dozens of new parties could ultimately bolster United Russia's chances in future elections*. 22 March, 2012. Russia Profile, RIA Novosti. RussiaProfile.org. <[http://russiaprofile.org/politics/56337/print\\_edition/](http://russiaprofile.org/politics/56337/print_edition/)>

<sup>127</sup> Boudreaux, Richard. *Russian protester finds another path to change*. 8 March, 2012. The Wall Street Journal. Dow Jones & Company, Inc. <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203961204577269241996622920.html>>.

<sup>128</sup> Bratersky, Alexander. *Underdog elected Mayor of Yaroslavl*. 3 April 2012. The Moscow Times. <<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/underdog-elected-mayor-of-yaroslavl/455996.html>>



mayoral race 57 to 40 percent. Though political analyst Sergei Markov, a United Russia member, wrote Andreyev's victory off as the result of a pro-Communist population in that region, others have argued more credibly that it is indicative of a nationwide trend<sup>129</sup>.

Before 2012, "any winner was always promptly incorporated into the ruling party and United Russia even celebrated such victories as its own," said Petrov, commenting on what makes these smaller victories important. "Now the trend is going to be different. Urlashov has already said that he would not join United Russia<sup>130</sup>." Some analysts, like Alexander Kynev, have even argued that these races show voter dissatisfaction with United Russia is so high that unless there is "cooperation with the systemic opposition, with the non-systemic opposition and with civil society," and the party abandons "bellicose rhetoric," it will quickly lose political viability.<sup>131</sup> More realistically, these elections show that the Kremlin will, because of these losses, reevaluate its ties with United Russia over the next few years. The more important result, however, will be an improvement in the independence and quality of the democracy that Russians interact with on a local, day-to-day level, which will do more than any oppositionist's speech to raise Russians' faith in democracy.

Although Putin's electoral base is generally away from the cities, in the regions, Mikhail Dmitriev of the Centre for Strategic Research argued in the Economist argued that the trend of localized opposition politics is "a symptom of people's lack of trust in politicians and parties at the federal level. People are looking not for politicians boasting promises and programmes, but for local administrators capable of solving local problems...[like] health care, education, and

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<sup>129</sup> Eremenko, Alexey. *Ruling Party Loses Vote in 'Russian Detroit.'* 19 March, 2012. Moscow. RIA Novosti. RIAN.ru. <<http://en.rian.ru/society/20120319/172263748.html>>

<sup>130</sup> Alexandrova, Lyudmila. *Ruling party suffers more losses in mayoral elections.* 3 April, 2012. ITAR-TASS World Service. via Johnson's Russia List at CDI.org.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

roads.<sup>132</sup> The importance of these civilizational aspects of democracy was discussed previously; by winning local elections, new politicians are able to directly demonstrate the value of a viable opposition and fully functional democracy to ordinary Russians who, polling shows, are losing faith in the viability of democratic institutions<sup>133</sup>.

None of the emerging local opposition will have any influence over national or foreign policy; however, their uniquely close position to a populace distrustful of democracy but even more suspicious of established federal parties will allow them to make real changes in the way people view truly oppositional democracy by implementing reforms in local policies. They will have the most direct contact with Russian voters, and because of their independence and reformist attitudes, they will have the best opportunity to improve public faith in and desire for democratic government. Through local politics, the new oppositionists will form policy on civilizational aspects of society. The impact of their policies on peoples' day-to-day lives will demonstrate that grass-roots politics can effectively challenge the predominance of distant power centers in the Russian Federation and restore peoples' trust in democracy. The cumulative effect of real-world experience in democratic politics will reduce skepticism towards democratic institutions and, in the long term, promote the belief that a fully democratic, Russian-built political system can and should exist without the confrontational attitude and authoritarianism of sovereign democracy.

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<sup>132</sup> Economist. *Politics begins at home: A new political landscape is emerging: local, energetic and mistrustful*. 7 April, 2012. Moscow. Print Edition. The Economist Newspaper Ltd. <<http://www.economist.com/node/21552241/print>>

<sup>133</sup> Interfax. *Russians losing faith in democracy and elections, pollsters say*. 29 February 2012. via Johnson's Russia List at CDI.org. <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/russia-russians-losing-faith-in-elections-democracy-501.cfm>>

## **The Next 6 Years of Russian Democracy**

Having thoroughly examined the parties, personalities, rhetoric, and trends in Russia's fledgling democratic system it is now possible to predict the significant choices that Putin and the opposition will make over his next term, and to explore some of the consequences those decisions will have on Russian democracy. These predictions represent one possible path of political development, based on the likely decisions of Russia's internal political actors.

Over his third term, Putin will slowly distance himself from United Russia. Due to the party's increasing unpopularity, he will use the imminent reorganization of parliamentary parties to bring his All-Russia People's Front (ONF) onto the national stage as a modern party that more accurately represents the needs of ordinary Russians. In policy matters, ONF will be nearly identical to United Russia, though differences in tone and message will make it more appealing to certain voters. Ultimately, though slowly, United Russia will be replaced as the main party of power, and ONF will become the hand of the Kremlin. Despite visible shakeups in both parties, which Putin will promote as part of his efforts to reform the Duma, they will not alter his entrenched power structure by giving the ONF any more real power than United Russia ever had, and his core realist ideology will remain the guiding force of both parties.

Throughout his third term, Putin will retain his regional base of support, but his popularity in the cities will continue to decline. As more independent oppositionists win office away from the urban centers, however, that base will begin to erode. Overall, his popularity will steadily decline, though he will still command a plurality of support in polls throughout most, but more likely all, of his third term. Midway through the term, when his regional support has begun to fade, the president will likely begin to escalate the anti-Western and nationalist rhetoric with which he has always secured the regional votes.

Escalating the accusations against the West will make relations more tense throughout this term. Given his increased economic cooperation with the West, however, Putin will not escalate his criticisms to the point of alienating other nations sufficiently to bring about a Russian fortress scenario. The Obama Administration, through experienced officials like McFaul, has dedicated large diplomatic resources to improving the Russian-U.S. relationship, and these efforts will also help mitigate the escalation of Putin's nationalism. However, on matters of national security, which is nearly every international matter to him, Putin will be far less cautious with his nationalism.

Certain plausible events, such as intervention in Syria by NATO or a renewed outbreak of violence in the Caucasus, would not only cause Putin to back Russia away from the world stage but also an outpouring of support for the president's strong nationalist position on such an event. Rising international tensions through global conflict or the election of a prominent anti-Russian politician, for example Mitt Romney, who recently called Russia America's "number one geopolitical foe," would cause Russians to be more supportive of any potential increase in Putin's nationalist rhetoric. Combined with the soon-to-be strengthened nationalist opposition, over Putin's next term Russia will always be one major conflict away from Melville's "Fortress Russia."

Concerning democratic reform, Putin will offer small policy measures that, while overtly expanding and reforming the political system, will in actuality strengthen the administration's control over instruments of policy, solidify Putinism's vertical power structure, and subtly delegitimize the opposition to ordinary voters. This duplicity of purpose can already be seen in the new party legislation, which expanded parliament in a way that will, at least in the short term,

afford Putin more control over the dominant political narrative. Through such light concessions, he will very effectively steer Russia toward the "Kremlin Gambit" by 2018.

In that next election, Putin will not be on the ballot. While he may still be popular enough to win the 2018 contest, it would be far closer than 2012, and he would not be able to retain firm control of his political system over a fourth term. By then, too many people will be dissatisfied with the continued dominance of one increasingly unpopular president. But do not expect him to ride quietly off into the sunset, either. Putin's skill with long term strategy means that he is already planning his succession for 2018. The only currently well-known candidate, Medvedev, has the advantage of Putin's great faith in him that the premier can further his vision for Russia in a way that will not alienate voters with his continued presence in government. Medvedev is certainly the president's most trusted ally, but it is more likely that Putin will promote a new face to appeal to a new generation of Russian voters, just as Yeltsin did as his own popularity waned in the second half of the 1990s. Whoever that successor is, he will be someone that Putin trusts to put a new face on sovereign democracy. Similar to Putin's rise to political fame through his economic and national security decisions, the chosen heir of Putinism will need to show that he can be decisive on political reform while continuing Putin's hard line on defense and a slowly transitioning economy.

The current parliamentary opposition will undergo a period of significant reformation over the next six years. The Communists and LDPR, primarily because of their entrenched leadership, will not alter their platforms and leadership quickly or aggressively enough to keep up with changes in voter preferences. An influx of nationalist parties under new legislation will gradually steal votes and members, and though the parties are unlikely to disappear entirely, they

will not weather the new pluralism well, and in the 2016 Duma elections they will most likely lose significant representation.

A Just Russia, due to its large membership, may fair better than the KPRF and LDPR. Unless the party is able to find a new, charismatic leader and more appealing platform however, the party will be divided into smaller, loosely allied, left-wing parties. This will increase the problems of an overly-pluralistic parliament, but a few individual parties created in the breakup of A Just Russia are certain to earn seats in the Duma, and are likely to be open to cooperation and coalition building with other center-left parties.

Prokhorov will continue to be viewed with suspicion by voters and experts, though he will remain in politics at the head of his new party. Mainly due to his celebrity status, the party will be prominent among the opposition, and members of the left-wing opposition will respect Prokhorov's opinion on policy matters. If he proves to be a savvy politician, he could unite several progressive parties in a coalition (if legal) around his. This would result in the best opportunity for Russia to elect a true democratic reformer, as Prokhorov as the leader of a large opposition coalition would be ideally placed to challenge Putin's successor. Regardless of the party, Prokhorov will run in 2018 and has a good chance to secure more of the vote than he did in March.

Yavlinsky will also be a prominent member of his party over the next term, whether that is an updated Yabloko or a reformed and rebuilt version under a new name. That party will compete with Prokhorov for influence over left-wing opposition elements, but the two parties will cooperate on many policy issues and in almost every disagreement with the Kremlin. If an opposition member is successful in taking the presidency in 2018, competition between Yavlinsky's and Prokhorov's parties would rise, though they are unlikely to come to represent

different poles of the liberal opposition. Yavlinsky himself will run for president, but he is less likely to win than Prokhorov. Conversely, his reputation for and ability to formulate intelligent policy will make his party likely to be successful in the Duma. Under his direction, Yavlinsky's party will be able to propose effective reform measures that, with sufficient cooperation in the next Duma, have a small chance of being enacted. After Putin's departure, Yavlinsky will cement that position as a skillful policymaker.

Prokhorov is the opposition's celebrity face, and Yavlinsky its political mind, and Khodorkovsky is its heart. On his eventual release from prison, Khodorkovsky will instantly be at the center of the opposition's ideological debate. He is unlikely to immediately seek political office, though he will remain an active critic of the Kremlin and a vehement supporter of democratic reform. Through his persuasive writing and speaking, Khodorkovsky will support opposition politicians and encourage cohesive work in the Duma. His political future is certainly murky, but it is virtually impossible that a free Khodorkovsky would recuse himself from the rising opposition movement.

The cumulative influence of the opposition will not be sufficient to alter Putin's course for Russia over his next term. Barring an increase in global conflict and Russia-U.S. tensions, Putin will navigate toward the "Kremlin Gambit," and through continued authoritarianism mitigated by inconsequential reforms he is likely to achieve it. For the foreseeable future, Russia will be at great risk of increased insularity from the international arena resulting in a "Fortress Russia."

The biggest story before the election was not the candidates, but the fate of the protestors, young reformers, and other elements of the fading unofficial opposition. Though the protest movement is waning, and is unlikely to return as former protestors look to legitimize their

opposition through new parties, the independent opposition that made those protests happen is still the defining change in Russian democracy that will be seen over the next six years. The protests succeeded in forcing begrudging, if duplicitous reform, but more importantly proved that Russians and their media can now speak out against Putin's administration. This was unthinkable in his first two campaigns, but that new freedom of political speech and the effect it had on their national dialogue will not disappear. Protests will still occur from time to time, though rarely with the force and anger of the last six months.

The fact that the protest movement is shrinking, however, is an extremely positive development for Russian politics. Though the activism did not result in major political victories, it allowed and inspired young, independent Russians to win smaller elections. These small victories are vital, because through these new reformers Russians in and away from Moscow and St. Petersburg will be exposed not to broad ideas on democratic theory, but the actual functioning of democratic institutions. People will see oppositionists and long-serving traditionalists on town councils and in mayors' offices argue their beliefs; they will see that a competitive, truly multi-party democracy can make positive changes in the daily quality of their lives. Positive experience with democracy will lead to more trust in its institutions and the national leaders, like Prokhorov and Yavlinsky, that support them, as well as increasing the demand of citizens for democratic institutions that are responsive to the people.

This bottom-up process will certainly not be quick, but gradually it will alter Russia's conception of democracy. Combined with consistent political pressure from the top, via the new parties and 2016 Duma, over six years this slow but steady progress will alter the political environment in Russia just enough that an opposition candidate will have a small, but viable chance of defeating Putin's successor. The opposition will remain vulnerable to Putin's reaction



to any number of economic or international developments, which could send the entire country scrambling back towards traditional Putinism; despite this instability, the events of 2011 and 2012 have set in motion processes of democratic development that will ultimately build the long-awaited, uniquely-Russian model of free, open, and responsive democracy.