

P6/b(6)

**Sent:** Thu, 12 Nov 2015 13:30:06 -0500  
**From:** David Johnson [REDACTED]  
**To:** "Wallander, Celeste" <celeste\_a\_wallander@nsc.eop.gov>, "Wallander, Celeste" </o=eop/ou=exchange administrative group /cn=recipients/cn=wallander, celeste a.c36">  
**Subject:** 2015-#220 Johnson's Russia List

Having trouble viewing this email? [Click here](#)

Johnson's Russia List  
2015-#220  
12 November 2015  
[REDACTED]

A project sponsored through the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (IERES) at The George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs\*

[www.ieres.org](http://www.ieres.org)

JRL homepage: [www.russialist.org](http://www.russialist.org)

Constant Contact JRL archive:

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs053/1102820649387/archive/1102911694293.html>

JRL on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/russialist](http://www.facebook.com/russialist)

JRL on Twitter: [www.twitter.com/JohnsonRussiaLi](http://www.twitter.com/JohnsonRussiaLi)

Support JRL: <http://russialist.org/funding.php>

Your source for news and analysis since 1996

\*Support for JRL is provided in part by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Open Society Foundations to the George Washington University and by voluntary contributions from readers. The contents do not necessarily represent the views of IERES or the George Washington University.

**"We don't see things as they are, but as we are"**

**"Don't believe everything you think"**

**You see what you expect to see**

#### **In this issue**

##### **RUSSIA**

1. Richard Sakwa speaks at George Washington University November 18.
2. Stephen Cohen speaks at the Commonwealth Club of California November 18.
3. Huffingtonpost.com: Robert Legvold on the New Cold War, Interview with Columbia University Professor and Leading Russia Scholar.
4. Sarah Lindemann-Komarova: Reaction to a piece in #217/Top Russian Media.
5. TASS: Moscow does not understand how money allocated by US can ensure media impartiality.
6. Financial Times: Russia accuses human rights group of seeking regime change.
7. Washington Post editorial: Russia cracks down on an important voice for human rights.
8. Government.ru: Dmitry Medvedev is interviewed by Rossiiskaya Gazeta on the paper's

25th anniversary.

9. ><http://gordonhahn.com><: Gordon Hahn, The Myth of an Imminent Anti-Putin Coup: Rusological Fail or Stratcomm?

10. Gazeta.ru: Website views Kremlin top official speech on 2016 parliamentary election.

11. Interfax: Medvedev: Retirement age has to be raised sooner or later.

12. Interfax: Minister says Russian economy to resume growth in second quarter of 2016.

13. TASS: Russian regions' debts keep snowballing.

14. Fort Russ: Russian economist: How can business survive in a shrinking global market. (Mikhail Delyagin)

15. Russia Insider: Airbnb and Car Sharing Are Booming in Russia.

16. Russia Insider: Alexander Mercouris, Russia's Economy Starts to Recover. Accumulation of economic data points to end of recession, suggesting that the economy is successfully rebalancing.

17. Russia Direct: How Russia can overcome its innovation challenges. Amidst the Open Innovation Forum in Moscow, Russia Direct sat down with Kendrick White, founder and director of Marchmont Capital Partners, to discuss how Russian universities can commercialize their most promising technologies and develop a thriving innovation ecosystem.

18. >[www.rt.com](http://www.rt.com)<: Putin wants official investigation into Russian doping scandal.

19. Moscow Times: Russia to Consider Criminal Penalties for Doping, Sports Minister Says.

20. >[www.rt.com](http://www.rt.com)<: Poor sports: 'Russia stuck in middle of global athletics crisis.' (interview with Martin McCauley)

21. TASS: Reuters' source denies any links to report on Putin's daughter.

22. TASS: Medvedev: Relations with West are complicated, but new wars are not to be even in thoughts.

23. Russia Beyond the Headlines: Georgy Bovt, Who is really throwing gasoline on Russia-U.S. relations? Accusations recently cast against Russia by Pentagon head Ashton Carter over what he sees as its irresponsible policies in Syria have threatened to overshadow overtures toward cooperation in investigating the Russian air disaster in Egypt.

24. TASS: Putin: Russia to develop strike systems capable of penetrating any missile defense shield.

25. TASS: Russia will not get involved in arms race, but has to eliminate shortfalls - Putin.

26. Interfax: Poll: 43% of Russians explain A321 crash with terror attack.

27. Bloomberg: Russia Sees Syria War Endgame Stretch to 2017 as Talks Renew.

28. Wall Street Journal: Russian Proposal on Syria Fails to Gain Traction. Plan leaves fate of Assad unclear, sparking criticism from West.

29. TASS: Syrian opposition confirms Russia's proposal on constitutional reform.



30. The Long War Journal: Thomas Joscelyn, Assad regime, allies break Islamic State's siege of air base in Aleppo.
31. >[www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com)<: Free Syrian Army decimated by desertions. In Aleppo, the rebel group has weakened as fighters leave due to low pay, poor conditions and fragmentation.
32. Moscow Times: After the Crash: What Are Russia's Options in Syria?
33. Financial Times: Simon Saradzhyan, Putin should make Assad an offer he can't refuse.
34. Moscow Times: Josh Cohen, Putin Is Achieving His Goals in Syria
35. >[www.rt.com](http://www.rt.com)<: 'Russia's campaign against terrorists in Syria inciting retaliation.' (interview with Catherine Shakdam)
36. Moscow Times: Georgy Bovt, West and Russia Must Cooperate on More Than Terrorism.
37. Russia Beyond the Headlines/Kommersant: Olga Kuznetsova, Egypt air disaster: If terrorists to blame, did they have double aim? Egyptian authorities said on Nov. 9 that they had killed one of the leaders of local terrorist group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, which UK media report is responsible for bringing down the Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula on Oct. 31. Russian observers believe that if the accident was really a terrorist act, its perpetrators may have been trying to attack not only
38. >[www.thedailybeast.com](http://www.thedailybeast.com)<: U.S. Baffled by Russian Jet 'Bombing'
39. Irrussianality: Paul Robinson, RUSSIA INVADES IRAN AND IRAQ.
40. Russia Beyond the Headlines: Bryan MacDonald, The U.S. electoral match-up the Kremlin elite would like to see. Although the U.S. presidential election is still more than a year away, the candidates have said enough about Russia to give some insights into where U.S.-Russia relations are likely to go.
41. ><http://readrussia.com><: Marina Pustilnik, A Question of Terminology. (re Petr Pavlensky)
42. History News Network: Walter Moss, Review of Anthony Marra's The Tsar of Love and Techno.

#1

The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES)  
 George Washington University  
 November 18, 2015  
 The Ukraine Syndrome and European Monism  
 with  
 Dr. Richard Sakwa  
 Professor of Russian and European Politics at the  
 University of Kent, England

The crisis of state building and national development in Ukraine has deep roots and complex interactions, but ultimately the 'Ukraine syndrome' reflects the tension between two fundamental models of post-communist consolidation. The first is the monist model, which cannot be reduced to the integral nationalism of earlier periods but which

nevertheless draws on the power of the idea that there is some sort of coherent and autonomous essence to the Ukrainian nation that needs to be rediscovered and given hegemonic articulation in the contemporary Ukrainian polity. Ukraine is not unique in advancing this sort of restorative nationalism, and it fits into classic patterns of post-colonial development. On the other side, there is a more pluralistic understanding of the challenges facing the country, drawing on postcolonial theory to suggest that the emergence of a hybrid and heterogeneous nation is something to be celebrated and given constitutional form in terms of linguistic and territorial diversity. This tension in the post-communist era has become increasingly exacerbated, provoking the breakdown of 2013-14, because of the distinctive way in which the Ukraine syndrome has been internationalized. The European post-Cold War order also assumed monist forms. Instead of the geopolitical and ideological diversity proclaimed by Mikhail Gorbachev as he brought the Cold War to an end in the late 1980s, a type of monist cold peace was imposed, in which Atlanticist institutions and ideas were advanced as the only appropriate ones. This by definition excluded Russia as anything but subaltern in the European peace order. This double dynamic of European and Ukrainian monism combined with devastating effect, is threatening now a new division of Europe. The current crisis is effectively a struggle for systemic and institutional pluralism at the national and global levels.

Dr. Richard Sakwa is Professor of Russian and European Politics at the University of Kent. From 2001 to 2007, he was also the head of the University's Politics and International Relations department. He has published extensively on Soviet, Russian and post-communist affairs and has written and edited several books and articles on the subject. His current research interests include the democratic development in Russia, the nature of post-communism, and global challenges facing the former communist countries.

Wednesday, November 18, 2015

4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Lindner Family Commons

1957 E St. NW, Room 602

Please RSVP at [go.gwu.edu/sakwa](http://go.gwu.edu/sakwa)

The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES)

Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University

1957 E Street, NW / Suite 412 / Washington, DC 20052

Tel (202) 994-6340 / Fax (202) 994-5436 / Email [ieresgwu@gwu.edu](mailto:ieresgwu@gwu.edu)

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#2

Commonwealth Club of California

UPCOMING EVENT

Stephen F. Cohen: The Ukrainian Crisis - It's not All Putin's Fault

Wed, Nov 18 2015 - 12:00pm Add to google calendar

Location: 555 Post Street, San Francisco

Time: 11:15 a.m. check-in, noon program

Why Cold War Again?



Stephen F. Cohen, Professor Emeritus, Russian Studies and Politics, New York University and Princeton University; Contributing Editor, The Nation  
In conversation with Dr. Gloria Duffy, President and CEO, The Commonwealth Club

The consensus view in Washington and in the U.S. mainstream media is that the Ukrainian crisis, which some have called the worst international crisis of our time, is due solely to Russian aggression under President Vladimir Putin. Stephen F. Cohen's view, on the other hand, is that U.S. policy since the 1990s is largely responsible, and that unless this is acknowledged at least in part by Washington, no successful negotiated end to the crisis will be possible.

Professor Cohen's Soviet Fates and Lost Alternatives: From Stalinism to the New Cold War and his The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin are now in paperback. Come hear the provocative views of this influential and noted Russian scholar.

Order tickets here:

><http://www.commonwealthclub.org/events/2015-11-18/stephen-f-cohen-ukrainian-crisis-its-not-all-putins-fault><

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#3

Huffingtonpost.com

November 11, 2015

Robert Legvold on the New Cold War, Interview with Columbia University Professor and Leading Russia Scholar

By Samuel Ramani

MPhil student, University of Oxford

Robert Legvold is a Marshall D Shulman Professor Emeritus at the Columbia University political science department. He is one of the world's leading experts on the foreign policy of post-Soviet states, and a book reviewer for Foreign Affairs magazine. Previously, he served as the director of Soviet studies on the Council of Foreign Relations from 1978-1984, and as the director of the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace from 2009-2012. Legvold agreed to sit down for an interview with me in Moscow on September 24, 2015. The transcript of the portion of our interview dealing with his theory of a new Cold War is below:

Q: You have written a great deal about how Russia and the West are embroiled in a new Cold War. What is your exact definition of a new Cold War? And why do you believe Putin's anti-Western tilt warrants this label?

Robert Legvold: First of all I would like to emphasize that my definition for the new Cold War is far from universally accepted in our field. But my forthcoming book makes the argument that it is justified. I think the new Cold War began the moment we went over the cliff, and that happened with the Ukraine crisis. I don't agree with other new Cold War theorists like Edward Lucas and Mark MacKinnon who argue we have been in the new Cold War since Putin came to power. I think that view misunderstands either the Cold War



or Russia's relationship with the West. I trace this qualitative shift to be a result of what happened in Ukraine, with the Russian annexation of Crimea and Russia's direct support for separatism in the Donbas. Going over the cliff did not happen suddenly though, it happened as a result of a series of steps that cover most of the post-Cold War period. I see it as a phased process, in which no one, including the leadership of Washington, Moscow and Berlin recognized the phases we were in.

Q: You mention that the new Cold War developed gradually over the post-1991 period. What events in the 1990s precipitated the anti-Western tilt?

Robert Legvold: I think the new Cold War was rooted in policies from the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations. It is important to note that Obama's reset was the fourth time the United States has tried to reset relations with Russia. The ups and the downs in the past had elements among the downs that were pushing in this direction. Under Primakov, Russia began to have serious concerns about US policy towards Russia though this was often synthesized with considerable optimism about the future. These problems were there as early as the late Kozyrev era. But the origins of Russia's resistance to America's use of power in a way that undermined Russian interests came with Primakov's depictions of a multipolar world. In 1998, it was not clear to me even when I talked to Primakov, whether he actually believed that the multipolar world was a reality that the Americans simply didn't recognize, or whether it was a hope that he wanted to promote. In the end, Russia's diplomacy with China and India went nowhere, and Russia was not realistically looking at this time to supplant the United States. But the grievances began with NATO enlargement in the mid-1990s. There was another flow against the relationship in 1999 during the Kosovo War, when the Russians took a critical stance against NATO in that context.

Q: Vladimir Putin's presidency began with a thaw in US-Russia relations. Why do you believe that this thaw was not sustainable? And what would you characterize as the breaking point in the US-Russia bilateral relationship?

Robert Legvold: George W. Bush's presidency definitely started with a reversal of previous trends with 9/11, the Crawford ranch NATO-Russia council and the swallowing of the abrogation of the ABM agreement. But that very quickly gave way to tensions, with Russia's opposition to the Iraq War. Russia gained the support of France and Germany on Iraq. The domestic scene in Russia after Beslan began to trouble the Americans, causing Bush to openly display his discontent with Putin. Russia's democratic breakdown featured as an issue in the Slovakia 2005 summit. In 2007, Putin delivered a scathingly critical speech towards the United States, pulling all the complaints and frustrations of the Russians together. And then the war in Georgia sunk the US-Russia relationship to a new low point. Russia's relationship with the West by then was dead in the water and was being dominated by many negative factors. One factor was the missile defense issue in Europe.

Even during the Obama period, there was attempt at a revival, and for a period of the reset, it was working. START II was a highlight as was the creation of a northern distribution network with Afghanistan. The agreement to tighten sanctions on Iran in Resolution 1929 was a benchmark the Obama administration set. The International Security Conference on Fissile Raw Material was also a success.

The failure to make serious progress on missile defense was the first sign of trouble though, as this was a major priority at the Lisbon-NATO summit, which Medvedev



attended. In Libya, the Russians were upset about regime change but abstained from the mission for reasons of principle. I would argue that by 2011-12, with the anti-Americanism coming out of the presidential elections, hostilities had boiled over. Putin in 2012 told Obama in a telephone conversation that the problems were simply a consequence of electoral politics. But it turned out to be much more than electorally motivated, and Obama did not accept Putin's argument as an adequate explanation. Everything that has characterized the current Russia-US tensions was in place before Ukraine. Iraq is where it got moving and Ukraine just pushed it over.

Q: Anti-Western sentiments have been a regular feature of Russian public opinion since the 1990s, though support for these views have varied considerably over time. To what extent do you think Putin's anti-Western foreign policy is a response to public opinion in Russia?

Robert Legvold: In August, a survey was conducted asking Russians if they believed that the United States was pursuing a strategy to weaken Russia and turn it into a source of raw materials for the West. 86% of Russians said yes, 44% said definitely or entirely agreed with the statement and only 7% disagreed. In 1998, 75% said yes and 15% said no, so the idea that the United States is operating against Russian interests to stifle and undercut Russia has featured prominently for a long time.

Q: You mention that you regard the Ukraine crisis as the point in which the West and Russia indisputably entered a new Cold War. There is a considerable debate on whether the Russian annexation of Crimea was a planned operation dating back up to 20 years or a knee-jerk reaction to Yanukovich's fall. Where do you stand on this issue, and what do you think was the primary motivating factor behind Russian aggression in Ukraine?

Robert Legvold: I do not think that the Crimea annexation was the implementation of a pre-conceived plan that was in place and they simply seized the opportunity to execute it. I think it was event-driven; the contingencies for it (little green men, Black Sea fleet, etc.) have been in place for a long time. There was political pressure pointing in this direction. Yuri Luzhkov's rhetoric as Mayor of Moscow during election campaigns and other Russian politicians attest to this. The decision of February 21, 2014, came after violence the night before and negotiations of a deal with Poland, France and Germany for Yanukovich to hold elections by December and restore the 2004 constitution. When that deal failed and Yanukovich fled, the chaos in the Rada created an interim government. Moscow saw this interim government as not unjustifiably anti-Russian in its outlook. Russia did not realistically fear that Ukraine would join NATO, as Ukraine would not be accepted, but the interim government intended to push Ukraine as close to NATO as possible without being a member. Putin and his coterie of allies were vacillating, and Putin eventually decided to secure Russia's position in Crimea. The justification was that an anti-Russian government in Kiev would push the Russian fleet out of Sevastopol, and destroy Russia's position in the Black Sea.

The decision to move the referendum up and to annex Crimea was a separate decision that was not just about the Black Sea fleet. It was about Russia trying to put serious spokes in the wheels of whatever happened in Ukraine.

Then I think they made a further mistake, the Novorossiia project. That first features in the official rhetoric in the March 18, 2014 speech by Putin justifying the annexation. The Novorossiia project was sparked by restlessness in Eastern Ukraine that occurred in



reaction to events in Kiev. Maybe there would be a problem for the Russian diaspora in the Eastern provinces that needed to be stirred up.

By April, Russia was trying to change calls for more representation for Ukraine's eastern provinces into separatist movements and began supporting those who wanted to organize separatism. It was a bad decision to support separatism, as Russia thought it would get more support than the rump portions of Donetsk and Luhansk. That resulted in a war; Kiev responded very early in a clumsy but militarily harsh way. The Russians were involved militarily in open conflict and it became clear that unless it escalated into something much more serious than the Russians would tolerate, it would result in a ceasefire. Effectively a ragged stalemate like Minsk II, which was good from their point of view. And last May, even the separatists regarded the Novorossiia project as unrealistic.

The Russians have conceded that the territory they hold now is as far as they will go in Ukraine for now. So I have described an account of Russian involvement in Ukraine that is event-driven; its not implementing a plan, but the events driving them are not random or an extemporaneous reaction to Maidan. They are driven by strategic calculations, about the fear of an anti-Russian government in Kiev and concerns about events in Ukraine were part of a much larger US strategy promoting regime change in many places. US regime change efforts would spread across the region, and to Russia itself, according to this theory. Russia saw Maidan as part of a much larger geopolitical game, that did not just focus on Ukraine's international orientation but had profound impacts for the regime in Russia itself.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#4

Subject: Reaction to a piece in #217/Top Russian Media

Date: Wed, 11 Nov 2015

From: Sarah Lindemann-Komarova <echosiberia@gmail.com>

Recommendations for additions to the Russia expert media outlet mix: Response to JRL #217, Russia Direct's "Top 10 Russian media any Kremlin watcher needs to know" Uliana Malashenko's "special round-up of the most influential and interesting media outlets that provide insights into political, economic and social spheres in Russia."

By Sarah Lindemann-Komarova

[Founder, Siberian Civic Initiatives Support Center 1995 - 2014. Helped to establish this as the hub for the first civil society development support network in the former Soviet Union.]

It was somewhere between an "ugh" and a "yawn" that I decided to offer my own list of media sources worth knowing in response to the recent Russia Direct article. The whole concept of Kremlin watching seems outdated (ugh) and the yawn, everything on the list is well known to anyone who has discovered Russia Direct or JRL. More troubling, it is essential that America understand Russia better and following each of the 10 media outlets recommended regularly will not help you do that. What it gives you is the well developed and well financed vision and arguments of two sides of the political elite. Imagine trying to understand America through the prism of the NY Times, Wall Street Journal, Fox News and MSNBC. If I hadn't added the Portland (Maine) Press Herald to my mix, everything about what is happening there would be confusing.



The roots and edges of a society are found in the community, that is where the future will be defined regardless of what the political elite spins. As a foreigner trying to understand a country, I have discovered the most useful clues appear in the nuances of daily life, the things that surprise you, new information. The young man who paused on the snowy path yesterday to make sure the older woman leaning on a fence was ok. Front-page news she shared immediately with another woman who witnessed this small act of kindness and was equally impressed, "it makes you feel good about the next generation of young men". If you do not live in a country, the best way to capture the nuances is through local and regional Internet outlets or community focused NGO sites. The following is my media mix for keeping up and trying to understand the two communities I am most connected to. The first is geographic, where I live, Siberia and Akademgorodok. The other relates to my work, NGOs and civil society development.

#### Local:

Community Foundation for the Development of Akademgorodok: This NGO site will give you an idea of the cultural activities and actions happening here. No politics, no commentary. ><http://www.academfond.org/><

Academ.info: This is a community news outlet that covers events, crimes and local issues. Of particular interest are on-line press conferences where a wide variety of people answer questions submitted by viewers. Recent guests include the District Prosecutor, Director of the advertising company responsible for the new Novosibirsk Region branding campaign and the young woman who created a local movement demanding improved access to emergency care for children when her son died in the ambulance on the way to a hospital. Interviews, such as a recent talk with a member of the Novosibirsk Coordinating Council for the Defense of Moral and Traditional Values, are also provide important insights. ><http://www.academ.info/conference><

#### Regional:

NGS is a regional news outlet. Based in Novosibirsk, it also covers neighboring regions Krasnoyarsk, Omsk and Kemerovo. Here, I would also recommend the on-line conferences that cover an astonishing array of topics from "Charity During the Crisis" to "The new personal bankruptcy law, plus's and minus's" to "The Autism Epidemic", even "The Business of Children: Who needs children's beauty contests?". The guests are interesting to watch, I was particularly struck by the behavior of Artem Loskytov, a candidate for the opposition PARNAS party until they were disqualified, who had to be told several times by the journalist to stop using his cell phone during the interview. Often even more interesting than the guests are the questions submitted by viewers. This was true during a March 30 interview with opposition leader and Novosibirsk Federal Duma Representative (party list candidate he has never lived or worked in Novosibirsk) Ilya Ponomarev. Currently residing in California, it was a rare opportunity for constituents to dialogue with their elected representative. All this and much more are on-line here. ><http://news.ngs.ru/conferences/online/><

SibFm is a hipster on-line magazine that has interesting stories and great pictures. ><http://sib.fm/><

Civil Society Development National

Agency for Social Information is a Moscow based NGO that was created in the first wave of US supported NGO development. They have stayed true to their grassroots and maintained strong and respectful ties with regional NGO leaders. This is the best source for anyone interested in NGO and civil society development in Russia.

><http://www.asi.org.ru/><

I am sure there is a similarly rich array of Internet outlets in all regions of Russia. I recommend you choose a topic and region you are most interested in, Yandex or Google search a bit and add some local, regional and NGO sites to your mix.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#5

Moscow does not understand how money allocated by US can ensure media impartiality

MOSCOW, November 12. /TASS/. Russia does not understand how media receiving money from US government agencies for their work may remain independent and provide impartial information, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said on Thursday.

"It is planned to allocate \$86 million next year on programs to counter Russian propaganda and the construction of civil society, including \$16 million for independent media. Independent media will thus be supported at the expense of US government agencies. Is that possible?" she noted.

Zakharova added that Washington had tried to present such "independent and impartial" picture of events with the support of US government agencies in the past. "After the MH17 crash in July 2014, 130 American specialists were sent to cover the incident. And they created an 'unbiased' picture of the tragedy," the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#6

Financial Times

November 12, 2015

Russia accuses human rights group of seeking regime change

Kathrin Hille in Moscow

Russia's justice ministry has accused one of the country's largest and most prominent human rights groups of undermining the constitutional order by seeking to overthrow the government, threatening the group with criminal prosecution or liquidation.

The ministry hit out at Human Rights Centre Memorial for criticising both Russia's military action against Ukraine and the country's prosecution of 2012 protesters against President Vladimir Putin. It did so in its first annual audit of the group since it listed HRC Memorial as a "foreign agent" last year.

The move is only the government's latest onslaught against human rights campaigners and



non-governmental organisations, a push whose champions say is aimed at stopping foreign meddling but which critics say risks eviscerating the country's civil society.

By stepping up action against Memorial, the Kremlin has also brought into doubt the continued existence of a group that traces its origins back to the Soviet era.

The inspection report said HRC Memorial "actively engages in political activity aimed at forming negative public opinion about the policies of the highest organs of state power, expresses disagreement with the acts of government institutions, preliminary investigation results and court verdicts in prominent criminal cases."

It added: "Through its actions, the organisation has undermined the constitutional order of the Russian Federation by calling for the overthrow of the current government and regime change in the country."

The ministry told the FT in an email that it would "take measures provided for by the law" and was "considering informing" prosecutors.

Kirill Koroteev, a senior lawyer at HRC Memorial, said: "The ministry of justice has not told us what they intend to do now, but looking at their allegations, the possible scenarios could range from huge fines to a liquidation suit or criminal prosecution, maybe even on extremism charges."

Started in 1989 by dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov, a veteran nuclear physicist and human rights campaigner, Memorial is Russia's oldest civil rights group. It initially focused on unearthing the country's history of oppression. HRC Memorial, its human rights arm, was founded in 1991.

Over the past two years, both HRC Memorial and its sister organisation have repeatedly been harassed on administrative, procedural and ostensibly legal grounds. The government's move escalates the groups' long-running battle for survival to an openly political confrontation with the authorities.

The government fined HRC Memorial Rbs600,000 this year, arguing that some of its publications failed to display its "foreign agent" status. The group disputes this, arguing that the brochures in question were published by its sister organisation Memorial, which is not classified as a "foreign agent".

Now that it has accused HRC Memorial of legal violations for the second time in a year, the government can start procedures to liquidate the group. A dozen other non-governmental groups have been shut down since being listed as "foreign agents". An even larger number decided to close themselves when put on the list.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#7

Washington Post

November 12, 2015

Editorial

Russia cracks down on an important voice for human rights

THE RUSSIAN Ministry of Justice has taken another step toward suffocating Memorial, one of the world's most respected human rights and civil society organizations. The Kremlin hopes to cripple a group that has courageously defended the memory of Stalin's victims, while carrying out independent research into modern human rights abuses.

Memorial was founded in 1987 to preserve the history and memory of those who were brutally repressed by Joseph Stalin. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Memorial created a human rights center to investigate abuses and, by exposing them, ensure that the tragedies of the past would not be repeated. The Putin regime put Memorial on a list of organizations deemed to be "foreign agents" under a law that targets groups receiving financial support from abroad. The term "foreign agent" is redolent of Soviet-style accusations of treachery and disloyalty, and Memorial as well as others have rejected the label.

The latest pressure against Memorial came in a one-year audit received Nov. 9 by the human rights center in Moscow from the justice ministry. It concluded that the human rights center is "undermining the constitutional order of the Russian Federation" and "calling for the overthrow of the current government," as well as seeking "a change of political regime in the country.

These are grave charges, and absurd. According to the justice ministry, Memorial created "negative public opinion" about government actions in Ukraine, where Memorial has declared that Russia carried out "aggression" against another country and asserted that active-duty Russian soldiers were fighting, Kremlin denials notwithstanding. The government also charges that Memorial expressed "disagreement" with a court's verdict against antigovernment protesters stemming from a May 2012 demonstration in Moscow. Yes, this much is true: Memorial has openly disagreed with the Kremlin and the powers that be. It is not quite clear what the justice ministry audit will mean, but it could be used in further action against Memorial.

Russian President Vladi-mir Putin and his cronies fancy themselves the embodiment of the state, and anyone who creates "negative public opinion" must be "undermining the constitutional order." In this, they are badly confused. They are not the state; they are supposed to serve the state. It would do them some good to read the 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation. They would find that it guarantees Russian citizens freedom of conscience, religion, ideas and speech, and the right to freely look for, receive, transmit, produce and distribute information by any legal method. The constitution guarantees freedom of mass communication, outlaws censorship and guarantees freedom of public association.

Memorial does not threaten the constitutional order in Russia - in fact, it is the embodiment of civil society, that crucial connection between the rulers and the ruled that is so essential to a healthy nation. The real danger today comes from Mr. Putin, an autocrat intoxicated by power who cannot bear to hear criticism from any quarter.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#8

Government.ru

November 11, 2015



Dmitry Medvedev is interviewed by Rossiiskaya Gazeta on the paper's 25th anniversary

Dmitry Medvedev has presented an Honorary Certificate of the Russian Government and responded to questions from RG General Director Pavel Negoitsa, Editor-in-Chief Vladislav Fronin and correspondent Vladimir Kuzmin.

Question: Mr Medvedev, on 3 November the State Duma will start reviewing the draft budget for 2016 in the first reading. You have described it as tough more than once. That said, what merits does the budget have in addition to the required balance between revenues and expenses? And the second question: do we need an anti-recession plan? Ministries and experts have expressed their opinion on this score many times.

Dmitry Medvedev: Our merits are always the continuation of our drawbacks and the other way around. When a budget is tough, this is like two sides of the same coin: both its merits and its problem.

This budget's asset is that it is balanced, with a small deficit of three percent. This is important because when we stick to this firm macroeconomic approach, we understand that we are living within our means, that we can balance revenues with expenses, that we are not spending too much and as a result do not have unjustified costs or rampant inflation. In the final count, this budget does not hurt the interests of many citizens and economic entities. So, balance is a major element of government economic policy.

This is required not by the Finance Minister, who is firmly upholding these positions in the State Duma, nor by government meetings, but by all of us. If the budget is falling apart, as was the case when your newspaper had just been launched, the economy is upset by hyperinflation and devaluation of incomes and salaries, and people are doomed to poverty.

Importantly, this budget, with a three percent deficit, allows us to resolve all main tasks, above all, to fulfil the social obligations that we have assumed. In speaking about social obligations, we forget for some reason what they are like in 2015 as compared to a decade ago. I'm not even talking about the 1990s, when everything was difficult.

My point is that we have many more social commitments now. This is an achievement. However, to comply with them, we should create enough income, reduce inefficient spending and streamline budgetary items. Indicatively, even this tough budget retains its social orientation. It is enough to compare the budgets of 2016 and 2006. It is easy to see that the scale of social commitments, the number of various payments and measures for the support of the economy and the social sphere are still much higher than they were in 2006, although we consider 2006 and especially 2007 as the last pre-crisis years, when the country lived relatively well.

However, our expenses have also increased. To sum up, it would be a mistake to think that many government-protected interests suffer as the result of a tough budget. This budget provides for social commitments, industrial development and agricultural support. Expenses on agriculture are not decreased by an iota. Quite the contrary, they are continuously on the rise.

Question: What about spending on research and education?

Dmitry Medvedev: Most of it has been preserved, including on the key elements such as



universities, vocational and general education and the teaching staff, as well as allocations for raising school and university salaries. There will be money for all of this, in accordance with previous decisions, including the President's executive orders and the Government's Policy Priorities.

Were it not for the [economic] challenges, we would have launched several new programmes, but we can't do this in the current situation. Overall, the new budget is realistic and socially focused, because we will preserve our achievements from the past 15 years and especially the past few years. This is what I meant when I said that the budget's drawbacks are the continuation of its merits.

Question: Do we need special measures such as an anti-recession plan for 2016, or have they been incorporated in the budget?

Dmitry Medvedev: A lot will depend on the situation. It's no secret that this year we lived under an anti-recession plan. Actually, living under an anti-recession plan is simple, because you have a certain amount of money and cannot expect more. In the past, we expected new revenues in the future, for example additional funds in the second half-year, which we would redistribute among priority or underresourced areas. We can't expect this now. There will be no new revenues, in conditions of low hydrocarbon prices and sanctions.

The anti-recession plan worked quite well, on the whole. Its criticism was to be expected, as no one loves crises, but the plan was effective if only because we didn't have to introduce certain restrictions. The crisis was slightly easier than expected, and some other measures helped too.

Do we need a similar plan for next year? We'll see. If conditions deteriorate - and as reasonable people who are responsible for the national economy, we must consider all scenarios, even worst-case ones - we'll have to draft an anti-recession plan for 2016. Otherwise - and we believe that inflation will decrease to 7 percent and economic growth will resume next year - we'll work under a regular plan.

Question: The next question is based on a headline from Rossiyskaya Gazeta. It goes like this: "The Pentagon blows the dust off its military plans." In recent years we have heard increasingly often, unfortunately, that the West is on the brink of conflict with Russia, that the majority of the world's leaders were born after World War II and have not experienced all the hardships and horrors of war. What do you think is the possibility of a tragic scenario?

Dmitry Medvedev: I do not want to recognise this possibility at all. It has nothing to do with when they were born. Very few of the current heads of state actually remember that period. This does not change our attitude in the slightest toward the tragedy of military events, to the disasters of war. The planet has survived two world wars. It is obvious that we should not allow ourselves even to think about the possibility of something like that.

True, the international situation is not clear and simple these days, but, strictly speaking, when was it ever nice and easy? If we talk about Russia's relations with certain Western states, they are indeed far from ideal, as they are going through a difficult period, leading to this talk of a second Cold War. But never mind the terminology; what counts is the knowledge that any leader of any state, any commander-in-chief - the president or prime



minister of a parliamentary republic - is well aware of the responsibility for such decisions. I think that in the 21st century, this scenario is simply impossible.

Allow me to cite a well-known quote of Albert Einstein. When asked which weapons would be used in a third world war, he said: "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." He was suggesting that mankind would be unlikely to survive a third global nuclear war, and in this sense, his assessments are still quite relevant.

Question: Mr Medvedev, could you explain this paradox? Government officials are often criticised in public. There are plans to stop indexing their wages and a bill has been submitted whereby they will retire at a later age than others. A lot of other reasons could be cited that make a government official's job less than attractive. Nevertheless, the line to join the civil service is not getting shorter. In fact, the impression is that it is growing. What is the reason for that?

Dmitry Medvedev: There is an array of reasons. If the state is weak, then, as a general rule, nobody wants to be a civil servant; that is, if we speak about normal not criminal motivations. I recall that, in the 1990s, the state was far weaker and the profession of a civil servant was not much in demand. I socialised with all sorts of people at the time, and, by the way, also with students who I taught back then. Only a small proportion wanted to make a career in the civil service, even though everyone understood that no state can do without officials, no matter how they are criticised.

Now, over the past decade, there has been a revaluation of values because the state has become stronger precisely as a political institution. Naturally, this kind of state needs a large number of officials. To reiterate, the state needs civil servants. They must not be compared with careerists, let alone bribe-takers who have joined the civil service to get rich. Like any other profession, civil service varies greatly. It is one thing to work as a journalist for a small rural or neighbourhood newspaper but quite a different thing to work for Rossiiskaya Gazeta or especially be its editor-in-chief.

The same goes for civil servants. The majority are people who work for very little money from dawn to dusk. This is hard work. There are many women there, and it is wrong to suggest that they have built a career for decades to come. In all likelihood, they will remain in their modest positions, but this does not make their work any less valuable. Of course, some people join the civil service to make a career. I see nothing wrong with that either. This is the normal motivation for a modern person.

Indeed, we have decided not to index civil servant wages. This is explicable. After all, their wages are not the highest in the country, but, objectively, they are not the lowest either, especially regarding a certain level of state administration. We believe that civil servants can do without indexation for now, although I do not think that this is to the liking of all civil servants.

Regarding pensions, this issue was proposed to me as leader of the United Russia party and prime minister during my report in the State Duma. My party colleagues said: Maybe this issue should be addressed and we should start off with ourselves.

Understandably, sooner or later, we will have to make the decision to raise the retirement age. Life expectancy increases throughout the world and so does the retirement age. This



is an objective process. However, we should not jump the gun. This is why we have not taken decisions yet. However, when we do, we should start with those who are morally prepared. Our assumption was that civil servants are prepared to work longer than some other categories of people.

A bill was drafted and submitted [to parliament]. It provides for a phased transition to a new retirement age of 65 years for civil servants. If you think that all civil servants were overjoyed you are wrong. Again, everything depends on the position a person holds. For some, it is important to work as long as possible, while professionally in demand, and these are not necessarily some big shots. These may be people holding modest positions, but they want to work for a long time and make money and simply feel wanted. Other people have built their lives differently. They want to retire at 55 or 60, spend quality time with their grandchildren and go to the dacha. This position should be respected.

Question: In 25 years, our newspaper has gone all the way from lead press and linotype to the Internet. You are well-known as a web user. The number of your subscribers could make any newspaper envious. Do you or any of your family read print newspapers? And what do you think of them?

Dmitry Medvedev: I read print newspapers and I do not doubt that they are here to stay in this form. There's a definite convenience to unfolding a print newspaper and reading it. I read newspapers, including Rossiiskaya Gazeta, for example, at breakfast. I always have fresh newspapers lying on my table, so I unfold them and read. It's convenient. Second, it's very convenient, for me at any rate, to read newspapers on the road. I read them in a car, a helicopter or a train. That's one plus. And secondly, as you are well aware as newspapermen and experts in this field: when you pick up a newspaper you get a tactile sensation, the same as when you are holding a book, the feeling that this is embodied labour, embodied information.

When you look at a digital version, it's also labour, only it feels slightly different. And in this sense I believe print newspapers will definitely survive. True, for reasons easy to understand there will not be the kind of circulation that we remember from the 80s or the early 90s, but it is nevertheless necessary to preserve print versions within certain limits.

Remark: It's premature to bury them.

Dmitry Medvedev: I believe so.

Remark: We are definitely not the ones who are burying print media.

Dmitry Medvedev: And the last point. Some people simply don't like and don't use electronic versions. And we must respect their interests. There have been endless debates on when we should fully switch to digital TV broadcasting in our country. We can do it only when people stop using analogue TV sets, and they still use them. It's the same in this case. If people want to read a newspaper in a paper version, we must respect their choice.

Question: Mr Medvedev, mass media have always been and will probably remain a feedback mechanism between the government and the public. Have you, as a statesman, ever made a decision under the influence of the press or after sharp criticism from a newspaper? Has this ever led you to make a particular decision?



Dmitry Medvedev: Naturally, like any person, when I receive information, the more so if it's acute, I react to it. This is probably correct. What kind of leader would I have been, if I had concealed all that, saying: "We will return to this problem later this week!"

Therefore, very often after looking through newspapers or upon reading the comments I receive on the Internet, or after watching some programme, or the news, or anything else on TV, I, truth to be told, simply pick up the phone and say: "This is what has just been written or said about this or that person. Is it true?" They begin telling me whether it is true or not true and come up with their own version. If it's a question of some special circumstances requiring immediate intervention, then after such a phone call I instruct my staff to prepare a directive and this directive is published, and it's all done fairly quickly. In this sense, the work of the main government bodies and officials is also directly linked with the work of mass media.

Question: You are a photography buff. Why photography? What role does it play in your life?

Dmitry Medvedev: Everyone follows his own path. When I took up photography, it was still a craft because it required certain technical skills. I think I started when I was 11 or 12 at the Leningrad Palace of Young Pioneers where I took my first lessons. An entire floor was dedicated to the photography class to store all the negatives and chemicals. I owned a Smena-8M camera. Anyone who could shoot using a Smena-8M was guaranteed to be able to use any other camera because Smena was a bottom-of-the-line camera available on the market back then, meaning that getting the exposure right and taking a decent picture was a challenge. So, for me, photography has become part of my life.

I took a fairly long time away from photography, 20 years or so. Video cameras came around and everyone started to shoot videos, including me. But after I moved to Moscow, I felt I wanted to resume taking photos. I bought my first Canon film camera, which, of course, took me to the next level in terms of technology.

Then, the digital revolution happened, and now everyone is taking pictures of everything. I'm not a professional photographer. For me, it's a recreational activity, a chance to capture an exciting moment; all the more so as I'm privileged to meet interesting people and visit interesting places. It's just that taking pictures is not always convenient because I'm not comfortable carrying around a camera all the time. So, I have to take pictures through car or plane windows.

Remark: You can take more panoramic shots that way.

Dmitry Medvedev: That's right. I can take pictures from a helicopter. It's fun to be able to capture a moment in my life.

Question: Your son Ilya is 20. Does he agree with you about everything, or do you sometimes disagree about things? If so, can you share what you disagree about?

Dmitry Medvedev: He is part of a new generation. By new I mean new habits. We are used to reading newspapers in hard copy, while they are born with a tablet in hand. This doesn't mean that they don't read print newspapers, but their world is entirely different from ours. It took me a while to get used to computers in the mid-1990s, while they are born with it all. Otherwise, they are just like us. So, I don't think that the current generation is very different



from ours. This is a favourite topic of discussion between fathers and son - what we were like, and what they are like... This goes from generation to generation. In fact, people stay the same, and youngsters will always be youngsters.

My son argues with me about all kinds of issues. He does so for two reasons. First, young people tend to be stubborn in general. I remember well myself - I always argued with my parents on things that I wouldn't even think to argue about now. Back then, I thought that I must uphold my point of view. Second, sometimes he tries to argue about issues of substance, which is probably a good idea, as everyone must learn to defend their position and sharpen their arguments. He is studying to be a lawyer, so sometimes he even argues with me about legal matters, and provides arguments of his own, which is good.

Question: Mr Medvedev, people know you as a rock music fan, but what do you like to read? Who are your favourite authors? What books do you keep on your shelves?

Dmitry Medvedev: This interview is about the anniversary of a newspaper and various forms of reading, including various sources of information. When people ask what's on your shelf, I can say honestly...

Question: The budget book?

Dmitry Medvedev: No, no. It's not that bad. Of course, here in my office, I deal exclusively with documents. Every day, I sieve through kilogrammes, tonnes of documents. But your question was about reading. Of course, it's not only official materials. I don't consider them reading. It's my job.

With regard to the bookshelf, I read books in electronic form, and I'm quite comfortable doing so. The good part is that I can have access to several books at a time. If I get tired reading one, I don't have to start frantically searching for another, especially if I'm on the road. All I need to do is just click another title in my tablet and start reading another book. I have many different books, and I re-read some of them occasionally.

I always have some classics, our Russian classics, on my bookshelf. I have liked Chekhov since I was a teenager. I still read Chekhov, and do so quite regularly. Each time, I find something new for myself in his books. Although it is believed that Chekhov wrote sad stories, his books are a source of inspiration for me. I enjoyed reading Chekhov so much that, surprisingly, by the time I was 14 or 15, I had read everything written by him, including his correspondence.

I also like Gogol, who, of course, is a brilliant writer with a style that is unique to our country. I now read more of Tolstoy than I did when I was a school kid or a student.

Second, modern literature. I also read it occasionally. This may be a detective story, or something more serious. I read my first book by Haruki Murakami in the 1990s. He wrote several interesting books. The last one I read was 1Q84. I also read Goldfinch by Donna Tartt, and some contemporary Russian writers, including Translation from an Interlinear Translation by Yevgeny Chizhov.

I also like to read nonfiction. I can't say that I can focus on it for a long time, but sometimes I do read it, including books by Stephen Hawking. Normally, I don't last long, but I do nonetheless read a certain number of pages. Of course, I read books on economics and



modern research on political science.

So, I have a fairly large bookshelf, but, unfortunately, I don't have enough time to read.  
[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#9

><http://gordonhahn.com><

November 11, 2015

The Myth of an Imminent Anti-Putin Coup: Rusological Fail or Stratcomm?

By Gordon M. Hahn

Gordon M. Hahn is an Analyst and Advisory Board Member of the Geostrategic Forecasting Corporation, Chicago, Illinois; Senior Researcher, Center for Terrorism and Intelligence Studies (CETIS), Akribis Group, San Jose, California Analyst/Consultant, Russia Other Points of View - Russia Media Watch; and Senior Researcher and Adjunct Professor, MontREP, Monterey, California.

[Text with links here ><http://gordonhahn.com/2015/11/11/the-myth-of-an-imminent-anti-putin-coup-rusological-fail-or-stratcomm/><]

In recent months a series of articles often claiming certain knowledge asserted that Russian President Vladimir Putin would be overthrown in a Kremlin palace coup within days, weeks, or in the otherwise short-term. Now I am the last one to be immune to coup-predicting. In fact in my graduate student years I predicted in fall 1990 that there would soon be a coup against Mikhail Gorbachev led by the CPSU party apparatus and the siloviki and pinpointed figures like Kryuchkov, Yazov, Pugo, - all members of the infamous GKChP - as well as Oleg Shenin, the CPSU CC Secretary for party organization, who was spending an inordinate amount of time on party organization in the KGB, MVD, and military and led the party's efforts to back the coup.

But unlike such factually-based predictions relying on verifiable facts and statements, the spate of very dubious articles, putting it mildly, have lacked all basis in actual facts and had several curious things in common. First, all of them gave the impression that the writers were privy to inside information. Second, all of them described plots with similar characteristics. Third, all of them were written by writers with long records of producing biased and inaccurate articles on Putin and Russia. Fourth, they all included comparisons or references to Stalin when explaining one or another aspect of Putin and/or today's Russia. Fifth, all of them were published approximately at the same time as one or more of the others were published. Sixth, and finally, all of them proved dead wrong.

For example, in March 2015 during Putin's ten-day disappearance from public, former Russian presidential economic advisor and a favorite now of DC think tanks (the Cato Institute and Heartland Institute), Andrei Illarionov, predicted that Russia was days away from a coup that would overthrow Putin and begin a new Great Terror. The article, originally in Russian, was extremely detailed in terms of who would lead the plot and succeed Putin - his long-time associate and Presidential Administration Chief Sergei Ivanov - among other details:

Perhaps future historians will call these events the "conspiracy of generals." Indeed, on the one hand there is a lieutenant colonel. And on the other there are full-fledged generals: two Colonel Generals and three Generals of the Army.



After almost two weeks of fierce struggle under the carpet the picture of the battlefield, which opened to the public yesterday evening, leaves almost no doubt about the outcome. The party of "blood and loot" (in the terminology of [former Hudson Institute analyst] Andrei Piontkovskii [meaning the Kremlin's political party 'United Russia']) suffered heavy losses and is retreating on all fronts under the onslaught of the party "big blood" [meaning those who would like to carry out another Great Terror or mass repressions].

Missing since February 27th, [First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration and former FSB Director] Sergei Ivanov appeared in the public space, having secured an alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church or at least having secured its neutrality. ...

Unlike the "appearing" Sergei Ivanov, Putin has "disappeared." The cancellation of his visit to Kazakhstan and the information about his "illness" actively being thrown into the public information space makes one think about where he is located and in what condition he is physically.

If the proposed analysis is correct, then in the coming days the resignation of prime minister Dmitry Medvedev and the appointment in his place of Sergei Ivanov can be expected. The State Duma led by Sergei Naryshkin will ensure the proper vote by its members.

After that, the public is likely to be informed about the fact that a national leader (Putin) is in need of a rest. (Andrei Illarionov, "Zagovor generalov," 12 March 2015, (><http://glavpost.com/post/12mar2015/blogs/19293-andrey-illarionov-zagovor-generalov.html><)).

Illarionov produced no sources for most of his claims. Therefore, it is not surprising that none of what he claimed over six months ago was imminent "in the coming days" has come to pass. Again, this was likely either delusional wishful thinking on Illarionov's part in a stratcomm operation to sew discord within the regime. No matter; he will continue to be feted by the DC think tanks.

One month prior to Illarionov's masterpiece two other articles predicted Putin would begin a Great terror shortly; one by mainstream rusologist and professor Karen Dawisha (Karen Dawisha, "Nemtsov Killing: A Chilling Historical Parallel?," CNN, 28 February 2015, >[www.cnn.com/2015/02/28/opinion/dawisha-nemtsov-killing/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2015/02/28/opinion/dawisha-nemtsov-killing/index.html)<) and another by the erstwhile Whitmore of RFERL (Brian Whitmore, "Putin's 'Hybrid' Great Terror," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 28 February 2014, >[www.rferl.org/content/nemtsov-analysis/26874842.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/nemtsov-analysis/26874842.html)<))......still< no Great Terror.

Six months after his March article, in August, Illarionov was at it again on his blog with an article discussing the possibility of regime change as a result of Russia's economic crisis posted on the website of the state-funded radio station Ekho Moskvyy or Echo of Moscow (><http://echo.msk.ru/blog/aillar/1618316-echo/><)). That's right - a Russian state-funded (though GazProm holding's GazProm Media) media outlet posted a virulent oppositionist's article and not for the first time. This occurs multiple times daily on Echo (><http://echo.msk.ru/blog/aillar/1618316-echo/><)).

Writing in early August, Andrei Piontovskii, another favorite of the DC think tank circuit (Hudson Institute), wrote that the Russian elite had already "found a replacement for Putin", who be removed "in the next few weeks" (Andrei Piontovskii, "V Rossii nashli



zamenu Putinu, vsyo reshitsya v blizhayushie nedeli," Apostrof.com, 13 August 2015, ><http://apostrophe.com.ua/article/world/ex-ussr/2015-08-13/v-rossii-nashli-zamenu-putinu-vse-reshitsya-v-blijayshie-nedeli/2095><). It is now late September, and there has not been a single sign of instability in the interim. Similar to Illarionov's article in March, Russia's ruling elite had decided to remove power, according to Piontovskii, because "Kremlin plans" A and B in Ukraine had fallen through. Putin had failed to implement both a supposed Plan A (which actually never existed) which aimed at the "annexation of 12 provinces (in Ukraine) up to the border of Transdnestr (Moldova's breakaway republic bordering Ukraine)" and Plan B under which Russia would annex or ensure continued instability in eastern Ukraine's Donbass republics of Donetsk and Luhansk (Lugansk). Plan B also never existed, except perhaps as a necessity in the event Ukrainian war crimes under its 'anti-terrorist operation' against the Donbass continued. Like other anti-Putin plot oracles, Piontovskii saw Sergei Ivanov as the plot leader and Putin's successor.

In August, another favorite of the US think tank circuit, Paul Gregory (a stalwart at the Hoover Institution, about which I will be writing in my forthcoming book on the massive intellectual corruption in American rusology), claimed "Kremlinologists sense a putsch is in the air" (Paul Gregory, "Is A Slow Putsch Against Putin Under Way?," Forbes, 20 August 2015, >[www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2015/08/20/is-a-slow-putsch-against-putin-under-way/](http://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2015/08/20/is-a-slow-putsch-against-putin-under-way/)<). The absence of any data standing behind this assertion was tipped off in the title's claim that Kremlinologists 'sense' a coup 'is in the air.' But this is to be expected from someone who deliberately falsifies data. In March 2014 he claimed that the fact that a Russian presidential envoy, former Russian ambassador to the US Vladimir Lukin, telephoned the head of the breakaway Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), retired Russian intel operative Igor Girkin (Strelkov) as evidence of deep ties between Putin and Girkin and that Putin had sent Girkin to the Donbass to lead the DNR's resistance to Kiev's 'anti-terrorist' operation. Never mind that the phone call was announced by the Russians themselves in the person of Lukin and that it was part of making security arrangements for Lukin's official mission to, and arrival in Donetsk and for his negotiations with Girkin on the release of several OSCE monitors captured by the rebels and released as a result of Lukin's talks and Putin's intervention.

In this most recent piece the writer's distortions are no less robust. Gregory writes about "tea leaves say." The tea leaves say that "that the Kremlin elite, dubbed by some as Politburo 2.0, is currently deciding whether Putin should go." What follows is a very one-sided slant on Putin's policy failures which should be giving the 'Politburo 2.0' great pause about Putin's continuation in power. Oddly, Gregory contradicts himself a few sentences down the line when he notes that only the bureaucracy is a winner as a result of Putin's policies which are said to be failing the people.

Near the end of the piece Gregory gets to the 'tea leaves' supposedly demonstrating that the beginning of the "eventual end" of Putin's regime, which would come in the form of "an assault on Putin's closest associates, appears underway." Of course, everything ends eventually, and none of Gregory's 'tea leaves' indicate any elite disenchantment with Putin. The first is opposition leader Aleksei Navalnyi's expose` of a yacht belonging to Dmitrii Peskov, Putin's presidential spokesman. As an opposition leader, Navalnyi is by definition not part of the Putin's inner circle or 'Politburo 2.0.' The few media organs cited by Gregory that covered Navalnyi's publication are not newcomers to covering elite privilege and other of the regime's many shortcomings. Indeed, their coverage of Navalnyi's oppositional activity is nothing new for Russian media in general. It is just that writers like Gregory are so unfamiliar with the Russian media - thinking that in 'fascist' 'Putin's Russia' all media are



subject to broad censorship - that when his research assistants bring him Russian news reports unfavorable to Putin or members of his inner circle, he is sure he has stumbled on the beginnings of a coup plot and not the considerable number of media outlets allowed to operate independently.

The second tea leaf portending Putin's demise is the recent resignation of Putin insider Vladimir Yakunin as head of Russia's railroad monopoly and his appointment as a senator for Kaliningrad province. The most Gregory can muster about this event is that "something" very serious occurred, "(a)ccording to a source for Forbes Russia." Careful to avoid mentioning that one step Putin has taken to at least limit corruption and force officials to steal more modestly - 'po chinu' (according to rank) - by making them disclose their assets and sources of their wealth, Gregory notes "Russian press reports emphasize that Yakunin has refused to disclose the sources of his income because such matters are not discussed in polite company. Anti-corruption blogger Navalnyy has filled in the blanks with a 14 page inventory of Yakunin's properties, including his castle." Could it be that Yakunin was demoted because he flouted Putin's law and simultaneously got caught in possession of inordinate holdings? And what does Putin's ability to fire a high-powered official say about Putin's allegedly impending demise? Does it demonstrate weakness, as Gregory seems to be saying, or strength? Moreover, Yakunin's firing does not reflect the kind of regime split that will be crucial in any demise of Putin and/or his regime. Regime splits involve insider officials abandoning the regime, not the leader of the regime firing them.

Third is a "hit job" against longtime Putin friend and oligarch Gennadii Timchenko "by the semiofficial newspaper Vedomosti" (sic - Vedomosti is the correct spelling)." Again, Gregory has his media organs all mixed up. There is nothing 'semiofficial' about the newspaper Vedomosti. In fact, it is foreign, largely Anglo-American project founded jointly by the Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, and the Dutch media company Sanoma Independent Media. Neither the WSJ nor FT can be considered anything but antagonistic - vehemently and somewhat less so, respectively - to Putin. Russian opposition figure Gary Kasparov sits on WSJ's editorial board. Thus, in Gregory's ill-informed account, an anti-Putin, foreign-owned newspaper founded by anti-Putin, foreign-owned newspapers, is a semi-official Kremlin outlet "in the mainstream Russian press": "The oil trading colossus Gunvor, half owned by Timchenko before the sanctions were imposed, plays a recurring role in the narrative. Notably, Putin's clandestine ownership of Gunvor is purported to be the main source of his billions of dollars of wealth. Open discussions of Timchenko and Gunvor have previously been out of bounds in the mainstream Russian press." Given the tendency of Gregory and his like to characterize the state of media freedom in Russia as non-existent, one would expect that he would check to see if the universe had indeed been turned inside out and any Russian media, no less a 'semi-official' Russian media outlet was criticizing a close Putin associate like Timchenko. But why check, if the facts might get in the way of the argument.

The fourth and final 'tea leaf' again is another hit piece on a Putin associate, Putin's former personal body guard and head of internal troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Victor Zolotov. This one is published by yet another allegedly semi-official Russian publication; this time the website Kompromat.ru, with supposedly "strong ties to the security services." In fact, there is no evidence that Kompromat.ru has any connection to the security services. It is in fact a mysterious, albeit, compilation of compromising materials published in the Russian media and elsewhere regarding corruption and the like among those in and around the Russian (and other) post-Soviet power elite. It also includes a discussion forum that allows visitors to post articles and comments. Kompromat.ru includes hundreds of



publications of compromising materials on all of Putin's associates and on one Vladimir Putin himself. On the page biographical page for Putin we read about numerous corruption schemes allegedly involving Putin and his close associates going as far back as the 1990s when Putin was the deputy mayor of St. Petersburg.

(>[www.compromat.ru/page\\_10373.htm](http://www.compromat.ru/page_10373.htm)<).

On the basis of his non-evidence and misunderstanding about Russian politics and media, the author concludes: "At a minimum, some kind of power struggle is going on that seems to have Putin as its target. The pattern of attack is classic: bring down the big guy's supporters first."

Gregory then deploys (who else?) the abovementioned Piontovskii to argue against the view that after Putin's imminent demise little or nothing will change anyway: "Russian commentator Andrei Piontovsky begs to differ. He makes the claim that members of the Russian elite have been sending signals to the West that 'everything will be resolved in the coming weeks.'"

Days later another member of this circle of rusologists, former RFERL commentator Paul Goble, brought up the possibility of the removal of Putin by way of palace coup, claiming "Russia still is talking about the possibility of coups." As I have shown almost all the talk of a coup was coming from Western or Western-based Russian commentators. Although Goble addressed the issue in a more general way and refrained from claims of an imminent plot, he performed the key stratcomm function of keeping the ball of 'coup plots' rolling (Paul Goble, "24 Years on Russia Has Not Moved Beyond Putsch as Chief Means of Leadership Change," Window on Eurasia, 24 August 2015, ><http://windowoneurasia2.blogspot.com/2015/08/24-years-on-russia-has-not-moved-beyond.html><).

In August - a month ever since 1991 when Russians expect momentous events - that changed. Both Ekho Moskvyy editor-in-chief Aleksei Venediktov (>[http://echo.msk.ru/blog/pressa\\_echo/1605192-echo/?utm\\_source=infox.sg](http://echo.msk.ru/blog/pressa_echo/1605192-echo/?utm_source=infox.sg)<) and opposition leader Vladimir Ryzhkov (>[www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/putin-must-change-direction-or-face-a-coup/512204.html](http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/putin-must-change-direction-or-face-a-coup/512204.html)<) raised the issue of a possible coup in different ways but not in short-term perspective.

Now it is true that Putin's soft, albeit, authoritarian regime is vulnerable to a regime transformation at least in the long-term. But this will require a major regime split, regardless of whether we are talking about a transitional or revolutionary mode of regime transformation - a subject I have discussed in two of my books and in several scholarly and analytical articles. But the process of the development of a regime split usually takes a few years after economic or other difficulties, and there are no signs of such a split beginning at present. Indeed a recent Levada Center opinion survey found that some slight disenchantment - not anger - has only just begun to set in among the public. It found that 12 percent of respondents believe Putin's strong point is improved living standards, but six years earlier, in 2009, that figure was 22 percent. A similar pattern is evident in opinion about Putin's progress in fighting corruption. Only 14 percent see his efforts as successful, while 29 percent do not see them that way.

Moreover, the regime split, whether it ends up producing a revolutionary or transitional regime change (or no regime change at all) is a process very different one from the coup scenarios discussed in the pieces detailed above, which have a very different purpose from



scholarly or analytical analysis.

## Conclusion

So what stands behind these rather poor and seemingly manufactured articles developed from whole cloth but backed by major think tanks and media in the West. Clearly an intense hatred of Putin and sometimes of Russia itself is often at work. I have demonstrated the deliberate distortion and/or deep ignorance of the facts about Russian politics present in their writings.

However, it cannot be excluded that strategic communication operations originating in Western intelligence circles are also at play in many cases. For example, one purpose may be to paint Putin and Russia in the most terrible light for consumption by Western publics. This is most obvious. Another might be to sow suspicions between factions within the Kremlin itself. For example, many of these articles were translated into Russian or originally written in Russian and translated into English or originally intended for both languages. Thus, Gregory's article was translated into Russian on numerous sites, most notably Inosmi.ru (><http://inosmi.ru/world/20150823/229806099.html><). Ultimately, it is hard to believe that 'fellows' feted at major American think tanks - as all of the above authors are or have been - can be so ignorant of the such basic facts such as whether or not Vedomosti is a semi-official publication or not. If they are not, then they are distorting the facts. If they are, do they do so because they are driven by animosity towards Putin and/or Russia or believe the higher goal of removing Putin from power exceeds that of accurate analysis and the truth? But inaccurate analysis yields bad policy, and that does not serve the nation. If it is stratcomm, then perhaps the poisoning of the discourse and policymaking environment is considered the price to pay for victory over Putin.

Regardless, of the causes and intentions, the factual results for our national discourse are troubling. It needs to be remembered that these 'analysts' affect the opinion of the general public, other opinion makers, business leaders, and policymakers. As the referencing by the authors of some of the others reviewed above makes clear, these networks of articles create an echo chamber in which the same message is delivered; a message resting on a non-existent or distorted 'data' base. Things have devolved so far that articles no longer are based on facts and close, rigorous interpretation. This analytical approach is replaced by reference to other articles with no basing in actual fact or logical, verifiable analysis. The echo chamber echoes itself in exponentially expanding degrees of separation from reality. This explains much of what is going wrong in Washington in general and with the United States' Russia policy in particular.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#10

Gazeta.ru

October 26, 2015

Website views Kremlin top official speech on 2016 parliamentary election

Andrey Vinokurov, Primaries for the First Time. Volodin Meets with Leaders of United Russia Regional Branches



Vyacheslav Volodin, first deputy chief of the Presidential Staff, has met with leaders of United Russia's factions and regional executive committees. The Kremlin official explained how it is dangerous to manipulate the results of the primaries and what impact this could have on the party of power's rating.

On Saturday [October 24] Vyacheslav Volodin, first deputy chief of the Presidential Staff, addressed leaders of United Russia's factions and regional executive committees. The main topics were openness in the holding of the primaries and the new norms obliging deputies at all levels to submit income declarations and also to declare conflicts of interests.

Volodin linked both these demands with the United Russia people's potential result at the federal elections to the State Duma in 2016 which will also take place in parallel with the voting in 38 regions. "The federal campaign will set the tone but in the 38 regional campaigns you can set the tone too and this tone can be the most varied," the Kremlin official explained.

Later Volodin moved on to concrete examples, noting the number of candidates with a criminal record who took part in the past elections.

It turned out that at the municipal elections in Kurgan Region 116 candidates concealed their criminal records and as a result 42 campaigns were postponed to November. Admittedly, United Russia was in last place in terms of the number of candidates with criminal records - 20 per cent in total.

"What does this indicate? Does it indicate that we do not have anyone else or that we do not allow others to enter?" Volodin asked, adding that the primaries specifically must be the main mechanism that expands the line of candidates from the party of power as recently happened in Kostroma when United Russia entered a party representative who was a plant worker in the debates with the non-systemic opposition.

Another warning related to attempts to falsify the results of the primaries that can discredit the party and elections. According to a Gazeta.Ru source in the United Russia leadership, representatives of the party's regional branches are still asking the federal centre questions about who the election candidates are going to be. "It happens that they are asking potential candidates for money or asking whether we should really open our arena to those who have criticized us," the source noted.

Sergey Neverov, secretary of United Russia's General Council, told journalists about a similar instance: "A regional representative came to me and said: Just look at this deputy and what he has said about us. And this deputy is a non-party member. We reply: 'What of it?' But if he brings more people to the elections who vote for the party, let him come."

There is a fear in the party that regional leaders will try to start manipulating the internal party voting and field only "technical candidates" against their own candidates.

A source within the Kremlin is sure that meetings are now being held with the vice governors responsible for domestic policy - the upcoming elections must be legitimate and transparent: "They (the authorities at local level - Gazeta.Ru note) must understand what the tasks are."



After Volodin's speech the floor was taken by Konstantin Pakharev, first deputy chairman of the Crimean State Council, who inquired about the best way to conduct explanatory work on the new norms of financial discipline.

The reply was long but in brief its essence boiled down to the following: First, if there is something to hide, do not go into power and, second, given that you are responsible for administration in all the key spheres get your medical treatment at home, do not keep money abroad, and so forth.

However, medical treatment in other countries is just the beginning. According to Volodin, the former head of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk even obtained a green card.

"In that case you must come right out and say: 'I have sworn an oath to another country and if it runs into problems I will go and defend it and not my own country.' What are we doing?" Volodin asked indignantly.

Volodin also broached the topic of nepotism among the representatives of power: For example, when the head of a municipal formation retires and hands his post to his son. Here is another example: The father is a governor, the son head of a municipal formation. "Who gave him the right to use the party and party resources like that?" the Kremlin official inquired.

There have been occasions when governors arrive in a region from another territory bringing the whole team "trailing along behind them." "Not only do they appoint their own deputies, they also bring a legislative assembly chairman along with them, they bring a city head with them, they bring the leader of a faction with them to public elected posts where the local population is supposed to express its will," Volodin complained.

"High percentages (United Russia's ratings - Gazeta.Ru note) will start to fly around like leaves in fall and the electoral campaign will be held against the backdrop of a falling rating," the first deputy chief of the Presidential Staff promised those who do not heed his recommendations regarding the primaries and financial discipline.

Volodin was asked about what to do if the internal party voting contravenes interparty accords. For example, Fedot Tumusov, a Just Russia deputy, states publicly that within the Presidential Staff they promised him a mandate in Yakutia for not running against the current governor in the gubernatorial elections. Volodin replied that there were no such accords: The deputy made the decision not to run against the current governor because the latter was supported by the president. But the task of the regional branches is to ensure an open and legitimate campaign in which any candidate can win.

Sergey Neverov also broached this situation afterward: "It is not our approach at all to do a deal with someone."

The primaries do not preclude the possibility of talks between parties, a source close to the Kremlin explained: "The primaries simply determine who the party is going to field in the elections. If a leader of public opinion is outstanding, that is good. And the decision can be made later about whether it is in a district or on a list."

Political analyst Leonid Davydov believes that the primaries are regarded as an opportunity for balancing federal and regional interests and also for influencing inter-elite conflicts.



"As a result of the primaries the federal agenda will be the main one and the party will enter the elections as a united machine. If they are conducted as planned."

A Gazeta.Ru source acquainted with how the internal party voting is proceeding believes that the federals want a "lever" over the regionals via the primaries. Consequently the two sides will use the administrative resource so that scandals are highly likely. "The primaries level out the electoral system. Only those candidates who suit the federal centre will reach the elections by means of the primaries," he says.

Mikhail Vinogradov, head of the Saint Petersburg Policy Foundation, believes that the degree of "discomfort" for governors from the primaries will vary. "Some will try to achieve victory for their own candidates, others will do deals, yet others will resort to intrigue," he says. In the political analyst's opinion, the primaries are a "demand" for a reduction in the control on the part of governors and in individual regions such control is indeed falling.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#11

Interfax

November 11, 2015

Medvedev: Retirement age has to be raised sooner or later

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has for the first time definitively supported the future raising of the retirement age without saying when this decision may be made.

At present, the retirement age in Russia is 60 years for men and 55 years for women. The Finance Ministry insists there is no other way to resolve the problem of chronic budget deficit in the Pension Fund amid negative demographic trends. The Finance Ministry proposes that the retirement age be raised under the 'year on year' formula starting in 2018-2019 and that the pension age be gradually increased to 65 years for men and women.

The prime minister said during the discussion of the 2016 budget in early October that the government "would have to address the retirement age issue sooner or later." A month later the formula transformed and became more definite.

"Understandably, sooner or later, we will have to make the decision to raise the retirement age. Life expectancy increases throughout the world and so does the retirement age. This is an objective process," Medvedev said in an interview published by the newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta on Nov. 11.

Yet the premier said the time to raise the retirement age had not come.

"However, we should not jump the gun. This is why we have not taken decisions yet," he said.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#12



Interfax

November 11, 2015

Minister says Russian economy to resume growth in second quarter of 2016

The Economic Development Ministry expects that Russia's GDP will fall less fast in the fourth quarter than it did in the third, Economic Development Minister Aleksey Ulyukayev announced at a meeting with entrepreneurs from Baden Wuerttemberg in Moscow on 11 November. RIA Novosti news agency quoted him as saying that the economy was expected to start to grow from the second quarter of 2016.

"My understanding is that we went through the low point somewhere in June-July this year. From July the seasonally adjusted dynamics from month to month does not show faster fall, September-October show small increase and the lowest point was GDP falling about 3.8 per cent in the third quarter. It will not deepen any further. The fourth quarter will also be a little better than the third," RIA Novosti quoted Ulyukayev.

Earlier Deputy Economic Development Minister Aleksey Vedev told RIA Novosti that the ministry expects the annualized contraction of the economy to be 3.8-3.9 per cent in the fourth quarter compared with 4.3 per cent in the third quarter.

Ulyukayev also confirmed that the Economic Development Ministry expects Russia's GDP to start growing from the second quarter of 2016. "Thanks to the constant revival of consumer spending, first of all thanks to the rebuilding of the reserves of businesses and then thanks to resumption of investment activities," RIA Novosti quoted the minister as saying.

Ulyukayev noted that an indirect indicator such as PMI (Purchasing Managers' Index) was above 50 per cent. "This suggests that businesses start to perceive the situation as acceptable... The fall in investment has slowed down a little... We didn't even expect this. To be frank, we expected that investment would be the last to recover. However, it started to return a little faster than we thought," Ulyukayev said.

He noted that the inflation was still high in Russia. "It will now start to fall quite fast because it was affected first of all by exchange rate movements and the devaluation and it is, in turn, dependent on the dynamics of oil prices. Both of them are at present in a stable state," the minister said.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#13

Russian regions' debts keep snowballing

By Lyudmila Alexandrova

MOSCOW, November 11. /TASS/. Amid the economic crisis the debts of Russian regions keep snowballing. The authorities acknowledge that something has to be changed in the relations between the federal center and regional authorities. Experts warn, though, that unequivocally good relations of this problem just do not exist.

The Russian regions' state debt is estimated at 2.116 trillion rubles (\$32.8 billion). Since 2012 it has in fact doubled, Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said recently. At the end of



the year the regions' public debt will reach 2.3 trillion roubles (\$35.7 billion), the Audit Chamber forecasts. In combination with municipal debts the regions' overall debt at the end of the year will stand at nearly 3 trillion roubles (\$46.6 billion), the rating agency Standard and Poor's said in its Public Finance System Overview: the System for Russia's Regions.

The head of Russia's Audit Chamber Tatyana Golikova said just recently that the existence of 90 different types of budget subsidies produced an uncontrollable situation: the regional authorities have no time to find their bearings among the existing programs. "Time is ripe for changing something cardinally in relations with the regional budgets, and not take face-lifting measures," Golikova said.

The regions' worst debts are to Russian and foreign commercial banks, and also to international financial organizations: 37.6% of the overall debt. Budget loans account for another 37.7%.

"The situation for the regions is catastrophic, indeed," the head of the regional economics department at the Higher School of Economics, Aleksey Skopin said.

"The debt had begun to grow ten years ago, but it was only after the 2009-2010 crisis that it became an insoluble problem. After that crisis the federal authorities transferred many budget liabilities to the level of regions - everything that concerns the health service, education and the entire budget-financed sphere. The debt growth rates soared. The regions started cutting budget-financed jobs. In the private sector the social tax on businesses was raised and businesses responded with more dismissals of employees. That entailed another slump in the incomes of regional budgets. The sanctions turned from bad to worse: the regions lost access to western lending resources."

It would be wrong to say that there are no such problems in other countries, he acknowledged. "The Americans are in a no easy situation, too. Their regional and municipal debts are possibly not smaller than the federal debt, but they keep printing money. When their Congress decides to increase the national debt that means that they will print several hundred billion or several trillion."

The debts emerge mostly because the regions have to spend more, first and foremost to act on the presidential decrees to increase budget-financed wages, while regional incomes shrink due to two factors, the director of the Regional Reforms Research Institute under the presidential academy RANEP, Aleksandr Deryugin, has told TASS. "Profit tax reduction is one and cuts in the inter-budgetary transfers in real terms are the other. The country has budget problems. The federal authorities try to save wherever they can. Financial assistance to regions - both subsidies and grants - are affected, too."

The issue can be addressed in two ways. Either the parameters of the presidential decree concerning budget-financed wages will have to be reconsidered fundamentally, or all regional spending on non-working population will have to be transferred to the federal level. "But then the question arises. This problem may be taken away from regions to be handed over to the federal authorities. But the federal treasury does not have the money. An unequivocally good decision just does not exist. Some very grave decisions will have to be taken. For instance, the retirement age will have to be increased."

The regions are to be helped with federal budget money to pay the debts taken from



commercial banks. There is no other way out, says the deputy head of the public finance department at the Higher School of Economics, Dmitry Kamnev. "The regions' debts are a rather complex issue, but not a critical one," he told TASS. "But when the debts begin to be accumulated, this affects mostly the population of regions, their development and their attractiveness to investors."

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#14

Fort Russ

><http://fortruss.blogspot.com><

November 11, 2015

Russian economist: How can business survive in a shrinking global market

Mikhail Delyagin Blog

><http://delyagin.ru/articles/90063-biznes-dolzhen.html><

Russian author, economist and politician, director of the Institute of Problems of Globalization

Translated by Kristina Rus

About just how much the recession has affected the retail business, and what strategies companies should follow in order to survive, Retail & Loyalty Magazine spoke with a well-known Russian economist Mikhail Delyagin at the IBM Cognos Live Forum.

R & L: How would you describe the current situation in the Russian and global economy? What is the most likely, in your opinion, scenario of its further development?

Mikhail Delyagin: The world is now faced with a situation of complete uncertainty, one cause of which is the transition from money based economy, to technology based economy. Most of the players now don't have the slightest idea of that tomorrow will bring, because the technology needed for business development is no longer transferred or sold: only access to technology is sold, without the possibility to somehow adapt it to suit your needs.

In other words, technology is acquiring a character of infrastructure, thereby creating a new business ecosystem and offsetting the importance of monetary funds.

Another important sign of the times is the breakdown of the global market. To date, this process seems slow, but in the near future it is expected to accelerate, and the situation - both political and economic - will likely resemble the period between the First and Second World Wars.

The world is undergoing a hidden to the public, but rather 'effective' elimination of the middle class, and it is even impossible to predict what will become of the global economy when this generator of most demand will disappear completely.

Even more uncertain seems the future of democracy as such, after the extinction of its most important foundation. Thus, the basic contours of the future of the global economy can be seen, and although they do not inspire optimism, it is already possible to build more or less coherent forecasts.



In Russia, we are now seeing the final approach to the long process of destruction of the Soviet economic system. I note that the final itself can be very painful, and the hopes of the state dampening the likelihood of destruction are not very great, because the government in the end may also end up overboard. Only the certainty that in the next year there will be no qualitative change in the world or in Russia adds optimism: all the states have a sufficient margin of resilience. However, I note that many of the countries that seemed to be an island of stability, are no longer that - this also applies to Germany and to a large part France and Italy.

R & L: What sectors of the retail business proved to be most affected by the recession?

Mikhail Delyagin: Recommendations to the members of all the segments of the retail business are the same:

Get used to live and work in a shrinking market, because over the next 3-5 years you can not hope for any change.

Periods of calm, perhaps even short periods of growth are possible, but in general, the prospects of markets around the world are negative.

The main advice in this situation: all entrepreneurs who are not capable to increase profit in a falling market, must exit the business today: this is the only way to minimize the losses.

Note that this recommendation is relevant to the financial and retail business. You need to get used to working with low-income segments of the population, as strange as it may sound, representing the most promising segment, focus on extending the quality, as they today politely referred to repair, and to the degradation of not only customers, but also your own staff. Finally, you must adjust to the degradation of infrastructures in general. At the same time, of course, the population will acquire qualitatively new needs, and those who are the first to catch these changes will become the "king of the world" - the number of such successful businessmen most likely will not exceed 3%. The number of those who not only sense the new trends, but themselves will take part in their creation, will be much smaller.

R & L: What are your forecasts regarding the ongoing sanctions wars. Do we have a strong side in this confrontation?

Mikhail Delyagin: In fact, I do not really understand the meaning of this term - sanction wars.

Since 2008 all the countries followed an aggressive policy of protectionism, and the only country of the G20, which did not participate in these processes, was Russia. The beginning of sanction wars, in fact, eliminated this anomaly.

The policy of sanctions and counter-sanctions is not an anomaly: it is the most objective reality.

In conditions of growing protectionism introducing sanctions seem quite logical: any process is not always linear, but also occasionally abrupt. In the current situation we witnessed a sudden spike in protectionism - no more.



Much worse is the fact that Russia is now the losing side, because we are not too actively involved in sanction wars, because instead of hammering exclusively the fingers of our colleagues, we also hammered our own fingers. In fact, we punished not only and not so much our Western opponents, but many Russian businessmen who paid for the goods, but did not make it in time through the customs. The special geographical conditions in Kaliningrad and Crimea were forgotten, and most importantly, the issue of over-monopolization of the Russian economy was completely ignored, which responds with explosive rise in prices to all external stressors, as happened in the present situation.

As for the Russian counter-sanctions, they were not enough: if the government banned the import of cars and wine for a year, the sanctions by the European countries would have been abolished long ago.

R & L: What is your vision of the roles of government and business in an effort to exit the recession?

Mikhail Delyagin: State - is the brain and hands of society, it must establish the rules of the game, determine the goals and strategy to achieve them, as well as maintain the old part of the infrastructure. Its new part - IT infrastructure - is created by a partnership of business and society, and the old is entirely dependent on the state. In fairness, I note that the failure of the state in this area is typical for almost all the countries of the world. The problem is that previously it used to be the main subject of development, and in the past twenty years these functions have been assumed by the global business that is irresponsible by definition. In this situation, the state must recapture its lines of authority from global business, otherwise the economy could face monstrous catastrophes due to fundamental irresponsibility of control systems.

With regard to the role of business in an effort to overcome the crisis, you should not entertain any illusions: business is a mechanism for generating profit and not for solving social problems.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#15

Russia Insider

>[www.russia-insider.com](http://www.russia-insider.com)<

November 11, 2015

Airbnb and Car Sharing Are Booming in Russia

Moscow makes top 10 outbound booking list for renting giant Airbnb

French ride sharing service BlaBlaCar sees unmatched growth in Russia

By Alexander Vorobieff

Moscow is the biggest and densest city in Europe, with big traffic problems. So it makes sense that car, bike, and ride sharing will work here.

Airbnb is also a natural win in Russia, given the high hotel prices in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and the generally under-developed hotel industry, especially in the economy price tier. Crimea, for example, is a natural place for Airbnb to prosper. Plus the cheap ruble make visiting and staying even more attractive.



Two large car sharing projects have recently launched in Moscow, and Moscow's bike sharing program is growing, with the city building more and more bike lanes and storage options.

Companies that allow individuals to rent out an extra room in their home or to fill an empty seat in a car on a long road trip, are seeing the value of doing business in Russia, as more and more Russians start using such services.

San Francisco based Airbnb (a company valued at more than \$25 Billion), lets a homeowner rent out a spare room or a whole apartment, for a few days or even longer, charging a 6% to 12% commission on the owner.

Airbnb's country chief, Andrew Verbitsky, says Russians are increasingly using the service to make some extra income. One user of the site, Vitaly Shitnev, charges about \$54 a night, saying the room is occupied about two-thirds of the time. In all, he is able to boost his income by 20% a month.

Verbitsky adds that business in Russia has more than doubled in the past year, putting Moscow on the top 10 cities list by outbound bookings. Airbnb is popular because its rentals are often cheaper than hotels. Interestingly enough, unlike in many other large cities, such as Barcelona and New York, Moscow's city government currently has no plans to enact regulations or special taxes on rental sites. Currently, Airbnb has more than 18,000 listings in Russia.

French long-distance ride-sharing service, BlaBlaCar (currently valued at \$1.6 billion) has also seen large growth since starting its Russia operations last year. BlaBlaCar connects drivers to passengers and allows both to pick certain characteristics such as music preferences and degree of talkativeness to make the ride more pleasant. The company passed the 1 million users mark in its first 10 months. Aleksey Lazorenko, BlaBlaCar's Russia chief says "No other country in Europe has shown such a pace of growth after launch." The service allows its users to save a lot of money on travel. For example a car trip from Moscow to St. Petersburg costs about 1000 Rubles (about \$16 dollars), while a plane ride would cost five times that price.

Those companies that expand their business to Russia are certainly able to tap into the country's large consumer market. As in any economic downturn, there exist many opportunities for those that know how to do business.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#16

Russia Insider

>[www.russia-insider.com](http://www.russia-insider.com)<

November 11, 2015

Russia's Economy Starts to Recover

Accumulation of economic data points to end of recession, suggesting that the economy is successfully rebalancing



By Alexander Mercouris

As more economic data comes in, it is looking increasingly as if Russia is indeed starting to climb out of recession.

The evidence is still tentative - as it always is at the start of recoveries.

However the evidence is accumulating and points to a slow but steady improvement in economic conditions.

Firstly, though year on year GDP is still falling, this is now becoming a historic indicator. It seems that GDP began growing on a month by month basis in August.

Economics Minister Ulyukaev says that the year on year fall in GDP will be significantly less in the fourth quarter than it was the third. He is predicting an overall GDP contraction this year of perhaps 3.8%.

Given that the GDP contraction was 4.6% in the worst period of the recession in the second quarter, that also points to a return to growth in the third and fourth quarters.

This gradual return to growth has been written about as if it was somehow unexpected. In fact it is exactly in line with the government's economic forecasts.

These predicted that the worst period for the economy, the point when the fall in borrowing and investment caused by the sky high interest rates at the start of the year and the fall in demand caused by the inflation spike that resulted from the rouble's devaluation last year, would hit the economy hardest, would be the second quarter. The economy would then start to recover.

That is exactly how it appears to be turning out.

The fact the economy is moving in line with the government's forecasts gives further confidence that the recovery is for real.

There is now a high probability of an end to the recession and a return to growth next year.

Looking forward, there are in fact more grounds for optimism.

Year on year inflation is still hovering around 15%.

That too is now however a historic indicator. Though there are variations in official forecasts, the consensus is that inflation will fall to single figures in 2016, and may be as low as 7% by mid year.

The likely fall in inflation should lead to a fall in interest rates. Economics Minister Ulyukaev is predicting they could be in single figures by early next year.

In my opinion the Central Bank missed its window to bring down interest rates in the late spring and early summer.

Had it done so the effects on inflation and the exchange rate would have been minimal, but



the recession would have been less deep than it has been.

By contrast I think the Central Bank's latest decision to maintain interest rates at their present level at its last meeting in September was the correct one.

The end of the year is a traditional period of rouble weakness.

It is a time when many Russian companies pay their foreign currency debts, causing them to sell roubles to buy dollars and euros so that they can pay their debts.

The reason the rouble crashed in December last year was because the Central Bank underestimated this, and did not raise interest rates and provide foreign currency support to the banking system, as it should have done.

With the US Federal Reserve Board once again indulging in its tiresome fan dance - keeping everyone guessing whether or not it will raise interest rates in December - this is not a good time to cut interest rates and risk more problems with the exchange rate.

Besides the fact the economy is gradually recovering suggests that for the moment it doesn't need a rate cut.

The likely fall in inflation and interest rates should result in a recovery of demand and investment in 2016, leading to a rise in output, bringing the recession to an end.

In fact if one wants to be optimistic one could point to facts that in the medium term point to a boom.

Bank balance sheets - in poor state at the start of the year - are now looking increasingly healthy.

Russian companies are awash with cash.

Imports have been choked off by the low rouble.

Inventories must be running low given the cuts in output and the fall in imports.

There must also by now be substantial pent up demand. Car sales for example are expected to fall 30% in 2015, which should lead to high demand for cars when consumers resume buying.

It is not difficult to see how all this could translate into an investment and output boom once demand recovers.

Should such a take-off take place the lingering effects of the recession probably mean it will happen towards the end of next year or perhaps in 2017.

That is also the usual pattern in recoveries - a period of tentative growth followed by a surge as confidence recovers.

Are there any risks on the downside?



In the latest in his seemingly endless series of scaremongering pieces about the Russian and Chinese economies - this one illustrated with a picture of Stalin - Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, writing in the Daily Telegraph, says Russia is running out of money and faces a period of autarchy and poverty.

He says the accumulated budget deficit this year will be 4.4% of GDP - a figure he apparently gets from Standard & Poor's.

He also repeats without comment a fantastic claim that inflation is running at 30% - twice the official level.

He says the weakness of Russia's financial system makes it impossible for Russia to finance its budget deficit or indeed run any budget deficit at all.

The government says the budget deficit in the first 10 months of this year was actually 1.3% of GDP.

This would be a significant fall from the 3% of GDP it hit at the time of the worst period of the recession in the second quarter - a fact that points to a higher tax take, which may also be an indicator of recovery.

The government does expect to run a budget deficit next year.

The worst case scenario the Finance Ministry currently forecasts is that it will need \$15 billion of extra funding over and above what it can draw from the Reserve Fund.

It beggars belief that an economy the size of Russia's cannot find \$15 billion or make savings of that amount.

It should be stressed that for the moment this is a worst case scenario. If growth rate forecasts are met or exceeded (which is not impossible) this scenario will not arise.

Russian Prime Minister Medvedev - possibly concerned that the Finance Ministry's warning might be mistaken for a forecast - has rushed out a statement in which he points out that the government's forecast for 2016 is more optimistic, though he is careful to say that the government stands ready if the situation unexpectedly deteriorates.

Are there any other big downside risks that could darken the picture?

The big uncertainty is what will happen to oil prices.

The oil market is still in glut. The Saudis have however made absolutely clear they have no plans to cut output to wipe out the glut, and they anticipate oil prices remaining low for at least another year and possibly even longer.

Contrary to some wild talk, the Saudis are not going to run out of money. They definitely have the financial firepower to outlast the shale producers, who are their main target.

As I discussed recently, the Saudis are neither ill-informed nor naive about the oil market. On the contrary they know more about it than anyone else.



When the Saudis decided last year to maintain production at existing levels so as to keep oil prices low, they knew exactly what they were doing.

They must have calculated that it would take several years of low prices to choke off the shale producers.

That is exactly what the Saudis are now saying and common sense says they are telling the truth.

One should not confuse the self-interested pleas for what amount to output cuts made by certain people in the oil industry - spiced up with predictions of doom for the Saudis if these people don't get what they want - with what is actually happening in the real world.

Oil prices therefore are unlikely to rise significantly in 2016, and because of the glut there is a possibility they may fall.

Since the start of the year oil has generally traded within a range of \$50-60 a barrel. Occasionally it has gone above or below this range, but after a time it has always reverted to it.

Trying to predict with any confidence where oil prices will go over the next few weeks or months in a very volatile market is a fool's game.

On balance, assuming US interest rates do not rise in December by more than expected - which is unlikely - further steep falls in the oil price below the current range of \$50-60 a barrel look counterintuitive in winter when demand for oil normally goes up.

If there is a further major oil price fall then - with Russian banks and companies far better capitalised than they were last year and with imports already slashed - Russia's ability to ride out the fall will be much greater than it was last year, especially since Russia now has the protection of a floating exchange rate.

The never spoken truth is that it actually suits the Russian government to have oil trading at roughly the current level for at least another year - and arguably even longer - precisely because the low oil prices are keeping the exchange rate of the rouble down whilst making investment in the economy's non-energy sectors more attractive.

In his article in the Daily Telegraph Ambrose Evans-Pritchard talks of how Russia suffered an acute case of Dutch disease because of a hugely over-valued exchange rate pumped up by sky high \$100 a barrel oil prices.

Though Ambrose Evans-Pritchard certainly exaggerates there is some truth to this picture, though it is worth saying that Ambrose Evans-Pritchard never noticed the excessive over valuation of the rouble whilst it was actually taking place.

To my knowledge the only commentator who did was Eric Kraus.

If the rouble was overvalued before, then it is arguably undervalued now. The result is that Moscow has gone from being one of the most expensive cities in Europe for a foreign visitor to being one of the cheapest.

Given that the effect of an undervalued rouble is to choke off imports and make domestic production more competitive, it suits the government's current purposes perfectly.

Since the government's policy is to boost domestic agriculture and manufacturing whilst weaning the country off imports, it needs a period of rouble weakness and low oil prices to make that happen.

That is the same policy China followed in 1994, when it devalued its currency against the dollar by 70%. It was that devaluation that laid the foundations for the Chinese manufacturing and export boom which followed.

In fact in the not so long term the rouble is likely to harden irrespective of what happens to oil prices.

The major effect of the sanctions is that they are forcing Russian companies to pay off their foreign debts far more rapidly than they would have otherwise done.

Since mid 2014 total foreign indebtedness has fallen by more than a third - from \$730 billion to less than \$500 billion now - something which would certainly not have happened against a background of falling oil prices if the sanctions had not been in place.

This process of deleveraging is probably still continuing. Whilst it is underway it is dragging down the exchange rate - as well as slowing the economy - by forcing Russian companies to sell roubles to buy foreign currency to pay their debts.

The likelihood however is that by the middle of next year, or possibly a little later, this process will have run its course.

At that point demand for foreign currency to pay foreign debt will fall, with the strong probability that the government's foreign exchange reserves (currently \$370 billion) will by then be greater than the total amount of foreign debt which remains outstanding across the whole economy. To these reserves should be added the substantial amounts of foreign currency and foreign assets that will continue to be held by Russian banks and companies.

When that happens the rouble should finally harden, and its period of volatility and its lock-step connection to oil prices should finally end.

A rouble both stable and floating - and freed from the link to oil prices - should make inflation targeting easier, causing inflation to fall further and allowing the Central Bank to reduce interest rates even more. With the economy hopefully by this point enjoying the full benefits of the rouble's devaluation, the rebalancing of the economy would then be complete.

At the start of the year Putin predicted that after two years the Russian economy would have fully adjusted to the fall in oil prices. It is starting to look as if he might be right.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)



#17

Russia Direct

>[www.russia-direct.org](http://www.russia-direct.org)<

November 11, 2015

How Russia can overcome its innovation challenges

Amidst the Open Innovation Forum in Moscow, Russia Direct sat down with Kendrick White, founder and director of Marchmont Capital Partners, to discuss how Russian universities can commercialize their most promising technologies and develop a thriving innovation ecosystem.

By Pavel Koshkin

During the Open Innovations Forum in Moscow that took place from Oct. 28 to Nov. 1, top Russian innovators took the opportunity to promote a new agenda for developing the nation's innovation infrastructure, creating new startups and resolving challenges that hold back attempts to innovate the economy.

Russia's perennial struggle to modernize its economy has always attracted attention of its leading economists as well as their Western counterparts.

"The fact that our country has demonstrated outstandingly high intellectual results and can show them in mathematics, physics, astrophysics, chess, but failed to develop [effective and innovative] modern industry is a paradox that needs to be explained," Alexander Auzan, dean and professor of the Lomonosov Moscow State University's Faculty of Economics told Russia Direct during a conference in mid-October.

In order to understand this paradox and find ways of tackling Russia's innovation challenges, Russia Direct talked with Kendrick White, director of Marchmont Capital Partners, a Russian investment advisory firm, and associate professor at the Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod (UNN). He has worked in Russia for 22 years, helping Russia's inventors find common ground with local and international businesses.

With Russia Direct, White discussed ways in which Russia can commercialize its discoveries through a new generation of technology transfer centers and maximize the market value of its intellectual property, even during a time of economic crisis and a lack of funding.

Russia Direct: There have been many attempts to create various alternative technology transfer centers in Russia since 2000. By 2016, these are expected to appear in many Russian universities in order to increase competitive capabilities and commercialize research. You have such a center at Lobachevsky UNN. How do you assess the idea of creating such centers in Russia's academia and why do you think Russian universities need such a model?

Kendrick White: Traditionally, Russian universities have used a certain model for their tech transfer offices, but such offices really only assess the scientific discoveries and deal with domestic Russian IP protection and patent filing. That's mostly what they focused on until recently, with little research of the international market opportunities, and little assessment of the commercial value of new technologies, and little preparation of business models, financial requirements, or business plans.

These offices have generally been responsible for preparing the necessary paperwork to



seek Russian patents. And when Federal Law 217 was prepared in 2009 [which made technology commercialization possible at universities], that was a very good thing, and the tech transfer offices at Russian universities began to create new university spinouts, but unfortunately the main purpose of many spinouts was to secure short-term funding, without having much of an emphasis on creating real valuable businesses.

At Lobachevsky UNN, between 2010 and 2013 the university made a number of spinouts, yet most of them were not in fact commercially viable. These spinouts were primarily geared toward securing additional short-term grant funding, but they weren't able to prepare real functional businesses as they had few resources and little experience to do more, and that's very unfortunate.

To address that, we created a comprehensive Technology Commercialization Center (TCC), which included one of Russia's first ever proof-of-concept centers. This is the best practice which I learned from various U.S. universities, and their experience during the previous five years.

The proof-of-concept centers test the commercial viability of new discoveries and assess their market value. So, when you meet with angel investors, corporate partners or venture capitalists, you can speak with some level of intelligence as to what the real value of a technology will be to future market buyers.

Most Russian academic professors have little understanding of the commercial value of their ideas, and this can be the case with scientists from anywhere in the world as this is how scientists are trained to think and assess their ideas. This is quite normal. They are not prepared for these conversations and they can hardly be expected to speak directly with any investors as they don't know how.

What they understand is the world of fundamental science research and grant applications - but that's not what business angels want to hear about. Angel investors don't want to give grants to projects-they want to invest in real companies that are going to produce a future value and return on funds invested.

So, we helped create a portfolio of 25 different new spinouts in the university, and then brought a number of these companies to the University of Maryland.

RD: What goals did you achieve by bringing Russian companies to the University of Maryland?

K.W.: Well, we went to Maryland in order to collect data on the U.S. and other international markets. We paid the University of Maryland to help provide us with market research on the new technology trends in America and globally, as the University of Maryland is one of the top universities in the U.S. in technology commercialization. Unfortunately, such detailed research is not available in Russian universities as they currently do not have enough budget to buy the various kinds of market research reports, which any Western university already has ready access to.

The University of Maryland invests millions of dollars per year to buy fresh market research from the top consulting companies in the world in order to constantly update its comprehensive databases. And all of their students and professors have free access to those databases.



But in Russia we don't have that, and few universities or students spend time to really understand where to position any new technology discovery. Today's researchers and principal investigators need to look at the whole world, not just at Moscow, and to thoroughly review global patent search materials in English, not only desktop research through free of charge sources which cannot possibly offer a detailed review of market opportunities.

Summing up, the University of Maryland helped us understand how to adjust our own projects' business models and to understand what the market in the U.S. wanted from our new Russian technologies. So, we were able to take this valuable information and bring it back to Russia and to further develop our Russian spinouts, with the university having equity stakes in each of these. Following this, we then made new business models and investment proposal for our Russian investors, inviting them to support these projects.

RD: To what extent will the tech transfer model be able to fulfill its goals: commercialize universities' ideas / research, attract foreign investors and prevent brain drain?

K.W.: If we don't do something in Nizhny Novgorod to keep our young brave scientists here, they are going to leave and seek out success elsewhere. And that is natural; if someone is young and smart and full of ideas, and has a PhD in physics, he or she will surely leverage these ideas in order to make money and improve his or her personal family life.

That's the bottom line. Young people anywhere in the world want flexibility and mobility and the freedom to be able to make money, so they can relocate anywhere in the world to find a place that allows them to make the most money.

What we want to do at Lobachevsky UNN is to make our own innovation ecosystem as attractive as possible to help those students and professors to create and develop their businesses in Russia. We are working very closely with local and national business angel community and the international business community, and most importantly, we are reaching out to Russian industry to seek out partners and investors for our projects.

We are actively trying to talk to business people in Nizhny Novgorod, and our goal is to connect the university with businesses, whether it is international business or national level business or local level business.

RD: Could you give a specific example?

K.W.: In a bid to formalize professional and transparent relations with business, earlier this year our university formed an Industry Advisory Board and invited prominent local companies, like Intel Corporation, which has a large operation with a thousand people in Nizhny Novgorod. They joined and became one of the founding members of our Board. We also worked closely with companies like LG and Samsung that are also very interested in Russia and, particularly, Nizhny Novgorod.

We also invited other companies, including Bosch, Virgin Connect and Johnson & Johnson. We are simultaneously in the process of inviting Russian companies as well, but for some reason this process is harder to formulate. So, in my view, Russian universities should be ready to work with any legitimate production generating business in order to help



provide directions and assignments for scientists to consider.

RD: Yet some Russian professors are very reluctant to work with business and prefer to focus on either theoretical or fundamental science. Moreover, traditionally they see those academics, which actively deal with business as a sort of "apostates." How to persuade them that connecting business and academia is vital for Russia's universities?

K.W.: Working with business doesn't mean that all of the scientists at a university have to drop what they have been doing, and start working on business ideas. Not at all, that's not what I am saying.

Maybe, 80 percent or more of scientists and professors are going to work on fundamental scientific research and national security projects funded by the Russian government. That's absolutely fine; it is the same for other countries. But there is always going to be some percentage of graduate students and professors who want to focus on their careers and make money from business driven products. And the university has an obligation to create a system, so that they can do that, because if we don't create this system they simply will leave [the country]. Not only in Russia, but all over the world modern universities are all facing these same challenges.

In the United States, university professors are encouraged to do business; they are rewarded if they form business partnerships. Sometimes they are even expected to show their results in new product commercialization in order to achieve tenure track career development. Not all American universities have this policy, but many are now encouraging their professors to create partnerships with business. After all, that's where more and more funding is going to come from, as state and federal government funding becomes tighter and tighter.

In the U.S., funding from the government is not going up and up, as it used to. It is going down. In this situation, universities have been developing independent relationships with businesses, because the government can't pay for all the research that needs to be done.

In addition, modern university students and researchers in the U.S., for example, don't always want to work on the research ordered by Washington—they want to work on science projects funded by Google, or robotics projects funded by Uber or other major corporations. So, what I was trying to do at Lobachevsky UNN is to look at global trends and help our university to better understand these trends and adapt their programs to the changing global conditions and expectations and realities in our modern globally interconnected world.

RD: What are these global trends, from your point of view?

K.W.: Look at the Chinese. They have now increased the number of students who studied in America. Over 700,000 students from China are sent to America to study each year, and that is a 25 percent increase over the last two years.

So, China is actively studying the American technology commercialization model and when their students return, they use their knowledge to build their own innovation ecosystem. Within the next 10 years China is going to be a top leader in the global economy. Russia needs to look around the world for best practices just as the Chinese are doing now.



RD: Given the current economic crisis in Russia, to what extent is it reasonable to rely on the government to tackle Russia's innovation challenges?

K.W.: You can't exclusively rely on the government. That model doesn't work anywhere in the world. The state capitalism model is in competition globally with other forms of capitalism, this is obvious. But it's not the most efficient form of capitalism as competition is not encouraged, which severely limits the necessary investments into the constant modernization which modern industry needs in order to compete on a global scale.

RD: So, what does Russia need to do?

K.W.: Russia needs to create an innovation-driven economic model to diversify its overall economy. This is absolutely clear from any economic perspective. A diversified economy is what is going to bring success in the 21st century. So, the Russian government should encourage universities to become more independent and make their own self-sufficient relationships with businesses, both locally and internationally.

If Russia doesn't do this now, it will become even more dependent on oil and gas, remaining an outdated commodity-driven economy. This is an old model and it doesn't work now. Russia has a capability few other countries in the world have-it has the ability to be very creative and develop new fundamental science discoveries. But Russia has rarely been able to leverage these discoveries into real commercial products which can win global markets.

The leaders of the country should ask themselves: Why does this problem linger for years? The answer lies in the need to urgently modernize Russia's great universities and use global best practices in technology transfer and commercialization which is what I and the whole top management team at Lobachevsky UNN have been working on during the past few years. Today, we have succeeded in developing a new model which is open and available for any other Russian university to review and adapt as they see fit.

If Russia closes itself and decides that it doesn't want to collaborate with international partners, what can help advance Russian science in its development? In today's world, every student clearly understands that cross-disciplinary scientific collaboration is the only way to come up with real world solutions and new products which people can use to solve their problems.

If you want to create a solution to a problem, you have to find right partners, and these partners are most likely not sitting next to you in the same university between one biology department and one chemistry department. The people to collaborate with are people working on the same sort of problem you are, but from different angles. And they could be at another university in Russia; they could be at another university in China, or in America, or Singapore or Israel.

If the government doesn't encourage that [open collaboration between universities and partners], it is not going to happen by itself. And if it doesn't happen, Russia will continue to be an oil-dependent economy. But that type of economy is inherently unstable and highly cyclical. As the global commodity prices go up, the government can make a lot of money; as they go down, the country's budget suffers.

RD: So, getting rid of oil dependence is a big challenge for Russia. What other challenges

hamper Russia's attempts to modernize its economy and innovate?

K.W.: The lack of transparency. Very often companies send their technology broker representatives into universities. They identify some technology and buy it very cheaply for cash. In this situation nobody wins, because these companies don't actually get the best technologies, the professors get small amounts of money, and the university is hardly likely to get anything at all.

It is first and foremost necessary that any university first assess the commercial value of any new technology discovery and then negotiate with potential buyers or investors to get the best valuation for the technology. To take a leading position in the global innovation economy-and I firmly believe that this country can do this and become a strong economic power able to work on equal terms with any partners in the world-Russia first needs to better understand how to maximize the value of its intellectual property-and that has been one of our primary goals at Lobachevsky UNN.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#18

>www.rt.com<

November 12, 2015

Putin wants official investigation into Russian doping scandal

Russian president Vladimir Putin has ordered a thorough investigation into the alleged doping currently rife among athletes of the Russian Federation, saying individual punishment should be meted out rather than the country being banned as a whole.

A report on what has been described as a systematic, 'state-supported' doping program in Russia was published this week by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), which has also recommended the country be banned from athletics competition in the aftermath.

But Putin, speaking for the first time on the issue, called for a search for individuals within Russian athletics, insisting that those innocent of the crime should not be punished for others' actions.

"Sportsmen who don't dope - and never have - must not answer for those who break the rules," he said.

"If we find that someone must be held responsible for something of the sort that breaks the rules in place against doping, then the responsibility must be personalized - that's the rule."

WADA's report, which was carried out over the last year, began in response to German broadcaster ARD's documentary 'The secrets of Doping: How Russia makes its winners?'

Published in November, the report's co-author, sports lawyer Richard McLaren, says their findings reveal "a different scale of corruption", and even compared the issue with soccer's ongoing FIFA scandal, going so far as to say that actual results at international athletics competitions had been effected because of cheating.



Putin, speaking before a meeting in the Black Sea resort of Sochi, has demanded immediate investigation in light of the far-reaching report, insisting that an internal operation is the necessary step.

"I ask the minister of sport and all our colleagues who are linked in one way or another with sport to pay this issue the greatest possible attention," he said,

"It is essential that we conduct our own internal investigation and - I want to underline - provide the most open professional co-operation with international anti-doping structures.

"The battle must be open," he said. "A sporting contest is only interesting when it is honest."

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#19

Moscow Times

November 12, 2015

Russia to Consider Criminal Penalties for Doping, Sports Minister Says

Russia may introduce harsher penalties for doping, possibly making it a criminal offense, Sports Minister Vitaly Mutko said at a press conference, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"There are a number of measures we can take," Mutko was quoted as saying by RIA Novosti on Wednesday. "We can introduce new kinds of tests, moving away from quantitative indicators ... to the biological passport, which practically rules out manipulation."

"We want to take a serious look at toughening civil penalties, and perhaps even think about introducing criminal ones," he said, RIA Novosti reported.

According to Mutko, the ministry also plans to extend the responsibilities of sporting federations.

"They are independent organizations," he said. "It is always said that the state should not meddle [in sport], but they [the sports federations] should take responsibility."

He also said that the results of previous Olympic games should not be revised based on the analysis of doping samples, the BBC's Russian service reported.

The Moscow Anti-Doping Center had its accreditation suspended by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) on Tuesday, after a WADA commission report accused its officials of intentionally destroying samples against the organization's express wishes.

The ban took immediate effect, prohibiting the lab from carrying out any WADA-related activities.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#20

>www.rt.com<

November 11, 2015

Poor sports: 'Russia stuck in middle of global athletics crisis'

The best people in athletics do not proceed to the top. They take the money and the medals and disappear, leaving other less competent people to take over, says Martin McCauley, author and Russia analyst.

The Intentional Olympics Committee called for disciplinary action in the wake of WADA's report on alleged doping among Russian athletes.

RT: The World Anti-Doping Agency [WADA] report talks about thousands of athletes allegedly involved in the doping scheme. Can they all be Russians? Why is the focus on Russia now?

Martin McCauley: This is very interesting because they picked out Russia, because Russia is now in the dog house. I think it is because of a certain political atmosphere - the Cold War atmosphere you find in the world today. From the American point of view, you can't say anything positive about Russia. And if there is anything negative - we say it and do them down and so on. So, therefore any American would in fact... criticize Russia. So, therefore it is very unfair - unbalanced in many ways - that they just picked out Russia because, as everyone knows, there are other countries involved; I better not mention any of them. Other countries are involved in doping and there are thousands of athletes all around the world. Nobody has yet pointed the finger at China because it may be too sensitive. The interesting thing is that WADA has made its recommendation which will go to the international organization IAAF [the Council], and the Council will in fact then either ban or not. But the chapter on the Council in the WADA report has been withheld because it has been sent to Interpol, because there had been fraud involved... Because of this, the Council will then be in a difficult position because how can a Council actually decide this if in fact it is being investigated by Interpol for fraud.

RT: Are WADA's actions under question?

MM: Yes. And if you look at Seb Coe - he is now the president. But of course he was eight years as a deputy to [Lamine] Diack, and Diack is one of the ones they are fingering for fraud. Now, Seb Coe, could he spend 8 eight years as deputy president and not know anything? And if he knew something why didn't he do something? Yet he is the man they are saying must clean up athletics. He changed his view. Yesterday he said: "Russia has to answer to these things and put the house right and then they can go to Brazil next year". Today he changed his tune: "No, they should be banned..." So, somebody is putting pressure on him. So, therefore he is in a very delicate position because people look at his record and say: "He must have known something".

RT: Why is the media focusing only on Russia now?



MM: It is very biased at present because it focuses on Russia. And if you look at FIFA, Russia got the 2018 FIFA World Cup and there was quite a lot of press coverage of that saying it should be taken away from Russia. And now you have Russia in a center again because of President Putin, because of Russia's position in Eastern Ukraine and in Syria. And everybody is honed in on Russia. There is practically nothing which is positive being said about Russia. And it is going to be very difficult for Russia now because they have to offer more than proof that they are not guilty of some of these allegations or all the allegations, they have to come clean, there have been inspections and so on. And it is going to be very difficult. But that is only one aspect. The other is: athletics is in crisis. Football is in crisis; football is a business. But athletics that spans a whole world, and there are thousands of athletes who've been involved. One can go back to Ben Johnson in the Montreal Olympics; there have always been problems with doping in Olympics and in 2012 in London they talked about Russia sabotaging it. Well, Lord Coe was the vice president of IAAF and he was the one who ran the Olympics. And he at that time said: "There is a war against our sport - somebody had launched a war against our sport." And, of course, it turns out that the war was justified because this sport is corrupt from the very beginning to the end. The question has been put: "Why is athletics so corrupt?" This is the greatest sporting scandal that has ever been. Why is it? And the answer appears to be that the people at the top are incompetent. The best people in athletics do not proceed to the top. They get the money and the medals and they go away, and they leave others to take over. And these people are incompetent. They can be easily corrupted. So, therefore, the sport has to be cleaned or changed from the top to the bottom. But this is going to be a colossal job because at the next Olympics in Brazil the average person around the world will look at it and say: "Well, did he win fairly or did he not? I don't know." We have to wait a few years because then his medal might be taken away - that would be dreadful for the sport. So, at present athletics is in a dog house, beside Russia. And athletics worldwide is in crisis.

RT: Why is there such a clash between WADA and the IOC?

MM: In athletics the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing; it's a complete mess because tomorrow they may change their tune and Lord Coe may say something else, so therefore this is an ongoing thing and it just underlines the fact that athletics is in a right mess. And Russia is in the middle of it. But the real villain is in fact athletics as a sport.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#21

Reuters' source denies any links to report on Putin's daughter

MOSCOW, November 11 /TASS/. Gazprombank's chief Andrey Akimov on Tuesday denied any links to a Reuters news agency report about a daughter of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Gazprombank's press service said.

In its article, Reuters said referring to Akimov that Katerina Tikhonova, the head of the Innopraktika Company, was a daughter of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The bank's press service said that Akimov was surprised and bewildered when he read the

article of the highly esteemed news agency like Reuters, which had ascribed to him something he had never said.

"Mr. Akimov has never said anything of the kind. He is surprised that the journalists of such a respected and prominent media outlet had not only distorted but openly falsified his words. It is true that Gazprom cooperates with Innopraktika. It supports the company's socially significant projects such as the creation of a boarding school for talented children on the basis of the Moscow State University; the Atlas of Russia Values project; as well as innovative and scientific contests," Gazprombank stressed noting that neither Akimov nor other bank employees had information about Tikhonova's family ties.

Akimov himself is on a business trip to China.

Officially, Russian President Vladimir Putin has two daughters - Maria, 30, and Katerina, 29. None of the two is a public figure.

Some media have already tried to launch their own probes into the private lives of Putin's daughters. Some reports, for example, claimed that Putin's younger daughter Katerina who has taken the surname Tikhonova is heading the Innopraktika Company, which develops a scientific cluster on the Moscow State University basis. Those reports, however, have not been officially confirmed.

Putin told TASS in an interview last year that his daughters lived in Moscow and that he met them approximately once in two weeks.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#22

Medvedev: Relations with West are complicated, but new wars are not to be even in thoughts

MOSCOW, November 11. /TASS/. Russia has been having a period of complicated relations with the Western countries, but still repeating tragedies like World War II are unacceptable even in theory, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev said in an interview with Rossiiskaya Gazeta, adding most country leaders realise responsibilities for what they are doing.

"Speaking about relations of this country with a few Western countries - currently they are far from ideal, they experience a complicated period, some even say about the second 'cold war'," he said. "Anyway, it is not about terms, but about realising that every country leader, every supreme commander - a president or a prime minister if it is a parliamentary republic - realises well the responsibility for decisions of the kind. "

In response to a question about probability of new world wars he said "I believe this scenario is simply impossible in the XXI century."

"The planet has seen two world wars. Clearly, nothing of the kind is acceptable even in thoughts," the prime minister said. "I would not want to admit a chance of that."



He could not share the opinion the current generation of politicians, who were born after World War II, take calmer those tragic events.

"Not many of the current country leaders can remember that period; this would not mean we take differently the tragedy of war, the catastrophes of war times," he said.

The prime minister quoted Albert Einstein saying "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

"By this he meant to say that the mankind would not live through the third global nuclear war; and in this aspect this is quite true," Medvedev said.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#23

Russia Beyond the Headlines

>www.rbth.ru<

November 12, 2015

Who is really throwing gasoline on Russia-U.S. relations?

Accusations recently cast against Russia by Pentagon head Ashton Carter over what he sees as its irresponsible policies in Syria have threatened to overshadow overtures toward cooperation in investigating the Russian air disaster in Egypt.

By Georgy Bovt

The author is a political scientist and a member of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, a Moscow-based independent think tank.

Speaking recently to the U.S. military at a conference in California, Pentagon chief Ashton Carter remained true to himself and emerged again not only as a harsh critic of Russian foreign policy, but also a fierce campaigner for "deterring" it.

He lashed out at Moscow for "playing spoiler" in the Syrian crisis, "throwing gasoline on an already dangerous fire," and supposedly being involved in "nuclear saber-rattling."

Therefore, he proposed to work to "deter Russia's aggression" in Europe.

Carter's tough statements almost coincided with media reports about the FBI's willingness to assist their Russian colleagues in the investigation of the Russian passenger plane crash over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula (which may be the result of a terrorist attack), which killed 224 people.

Such cooperation would be the first such interaction between the Russian and American security agencies since the crisis in Ukraine and Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation.

One administration, different voices

As for Syria, the statements by the head of the U.S. Defense Ministry stand in noticeable contrast with the line of the U.S. Department of State. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his U.S. counterpart John Kerry have had a lot of talks in recent weeks on the subject of the Syrian settlement.

If accusations against Moscow about where it is throwing gasoline had come from the mouth of Kerry in Vienna, then it would have been, perhaps, the end of the whole multilateral meeting.

However, despite serious differences that persist in the position of Russia and the United States on the course of the Syrian settlement, it is still possible to talk today about a weak glimmer of hope for a compromise, rather than about the degradation of the situation.

In general, of course, such "stylistic differences" between the Pentagon and the State Department are par for the course. Apart from playing the "good and bad cop," this can be seen as the pursuit by each agency of its own departmental interests.

A desire to catch up

The Pentagon has long been looking for a reason and opportunity "to breathe fresh air" into the construction of NATO military structures in Europe. The Europeans have repeatedly been criticized by Washington for allocating to military spending a smaller share of the budget than what was stated in the plans and programs of NATO.

In addition, since 1985 the number of U.S. troops in Europe has fallen from more than 300,000 to just over 50,000. (This is less than in the Asia-Pacific region).

Now the Pentagon wants to "catch up" even despite the fact that the Ukrainian crisis, which served as a formal pretext for tightening rhetoric, is on the decline. Moreover, it has declined without NATO intervention, but by means of complex negotiations, in which, of course, Moscow's Western interlocutors resorted to pressure, but of the economic, rather than the military kind.

Besides, many European leaders have begun to make increasingly frequent statements that without Moscow's participation it will not be possible to solve the Syrian crisis, not to mention the fact that it will not be possible to fully solve the Ukrainian crisis without taking into account its interests.

In such a situation, when the "ship sails," they have to hurry, of course, to stake out new plans for military construction in Europe. Preliminary decisions on these matters should be adopted at a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in December, and then approved at the summit of the alliance in Warsaw in the summer of next year.

Harsh statements by the U.S. military became more frequent after the beginning of Russia's military intervention in Syria, which has turned out to be fairly efficient, to the surprise of many in the West. Moscow's actions in the Middle East have been represented by some U.S. media and, most importantly, by the Republican majority in Congress, as a "failure" of the Obama administration.

Compensatory rhetoric

The Pentagon's tough rhetoric in this sense is intended to "compensate" for the propaganda damage, and not to give the Republicans the edge in the near future, when the presidential election race begins to unfold. Of course, U.S.-Russian relations today are going through the most acute crisis since the end of the Cold War. Perhaps one can already talk about a new Cold War.



The Obama administration, of course, would hardly want to leave unresolved crises in Ukraine and the Middle East as a legacy for his successor. And if the sides have managed to at least stop further escalation of the former, the second large-scale crisis remains not quite predictable by the degree of its possible spread to neighboring countries.

In both cases, the transition to at least "cold and rational" interaction with Moscow could bring substantial results. Instead, individual representatives of the U.S. administration are making statements that are difficult to describe as anything other than provocative. That's who is really throwing gasoline on the fire, and in so doing seriously fanning the flames of Russian-American enmity.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#24

Putin: Russia to develop strike systems capable of penetrating any missile defense shield

SOCHI, November 10. /TASS/. Russia will be developing strike systems capable of penetrating any missile defense shield, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday.

"We'll be working on the anti-missile defense system as well, but at the first stage, as we have said on many occasions, we'll also be working on strike systems capable of penetrating any anti-missile defense shield," Putin said at a meeting on the development of the Russian Armed Forces.

Putin said the meeting would discuss the development of such weapon systems that would determine the outlook of the Russian Armed Forces for the next decade and will become a response to the challenges confronted by Russia.

According to the Russian president, the true goal of the US missile defense shield is to neutralize Russia's nuclear potential.

"The references to the Iranian and North Korean nuclear threats only disguise true plans. And their true purpose is to neutralize the strategic nuclear potential of other nuclear states, except the United States and its allies, first of all, the nuclear potential of our country, Russia," Putin said.

The United States and its allies continue building the global missile defense system, the Russian president said.

"Moreover, unfortunately, they are not taking into account either our concerns or proposals for cooperation," Putin added.

Russia has been assured on many occasions that the European segment of the US missile defense shield is developing in the wake of a threat from Iranian ballistic missiles, the Russian president said.

"However, we know that the situation with the Iranian nuclear problem has been settled and the relevant agreements have been signed. Moreover, they have been approved by the relevant parliaments. Nevertheless, the work on anti-missile defense systems is

continuing," Putin said.

Therefore, the references to the Iranian and North Korean nuclear threats are only a cover for the US true plans, the Russian president said.

"And the US true goals are to neutralize the strategic nuclear potential of other nuclear states, except the United States and its allies, first of all, the nuclear potential of our country, Russia. Hence the desire to get decisive supremacy with all ensuing consequences," Putin said.

"We have said on many occasions that Russia will take all necessary measures to strengthen the potential of its strategic nuclear forces," the Russian president said.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#25

Russia will not get involved in arms race, but has to eliminate shortfalls - Putin

SOCHI, November 11. /TASS/. Russia has no intention of being involved in the arms race, but its defense industries will have to do away with the lagging behind that developed over the previous decades, President Vladimir Putin told a conference devoted to the development of the armed forces on Wednesday.

"We are not going to join some arms race," Putin said. "Nor have we any intention to catch up with or overtake somebody. We are to just eliminate the lagging behind that developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the Armed Forces and defense-industrial complexes were chronically underfinanced."

Putin recalled that the theme of today's meeting, a third in the current series of conferences on the development of the armed forces was progress in the implementation of the state defense contract. He said that measures would be identified to determine the effectiveness of interaction by the Defense Ministry and arms manufacturers.

"Creation of a modern army, equipped with advanced hardware, remains one of the high priorities. As a matter of fact, it has been this way all along. Our task is to translate into reality all identified plans," Putin said.

The national state defense order fulfilment is going as scheduled and new weapons are intensively used, Russian President added.

"The state defense order fulfilment indicators for the first three quarters of the year suggest that defence industry enterprises and the Defence Ministry are meeting the schedule," Putin said. "In 2015, the troops received by a quarter more new and upgraded samples of weapons than in 2014. It is important that the supplied modern weapons are intensively used."

Putin said that the state defense order financing is going as planned under the state armaments program until 2020. "This is not some kind of above-plan urgent work. It's planned work. We had made up these plans 10 years ago," the president said.



According to him, the improvement of the efficiency and quality of combat training has been confirmed by military manoeuvres and drills, including surprise inspections. "I hope this will continue," he said.

On import substitution in the defense sector

Import substitution in the defense technology sector should positively influence on nondefense branches of industry, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"[Import substitution in the defense technology sector] exactly is the high-technology development of individual branches of our industry and, in my opinion, should also positively influence on nondefense segments," Putin said.

Such trends also exist in other countries, the head of state said. "We should ensure that we have the same ones," he added.

"It is important to continue import substitution of foreign assemblies and components used in manufacturing of weapons and materiel," the president said. "Now we have to substitute more and more sophisticated assemblies, parts and packages," he added.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#26

Interfax

November 12, 2015

Poll: 43% of Russians explain A321 crash with terror attack

The Kogalymavia flight crash in Egypt on October 31 has triggered a broad public response. Ninety-seven percent of respondents polled by the Russian Public Opinion Study Center (VTsIOM) are aware of it.

Knowledgeable respondents differed in their opinions on the causes of the crash: 43 percent are prone to believe in the terror attack theory, and 35 percent suggest a technical failure. Only 3 percent argued it could be pilot error.

Sixteen percent of 1,600 respondents polled in 130 populated localities in 46 regions on November 7-8 found it difficult to answer the question.

There is no unanimity about possible consequences of the plane crash for Russia. Forty-seven percent said nothing would change in the country's life and 41 percent expected consequences, with even 'very serious ones' being suggested by 25 percent of respondents.

Those who think things will change mentioned stricter checks and control of air carriers and airports (15 percent) and negative implications, such as a ban on flights, first of all to Egypt (9 percent), worsening relations with other countries (6 percent), an outflow of tours and tourism industry problems (5 percent) etc. Seven percent fear possible terror attacks.

An overwhelming majority is expecting certain actions from Russian authorities. Over half

(57 percent ) think that authorities should improve aviation safety and about a third (32 percent ) call for the stepping up of anti-terrorism measures.

Another 28 percent call for the suspension of flights of Russian planes above war zones. Nine percent choose Russia's withdrawal from the war in Syria, and 2 percent say nothing should be done.

The poll was held in the first days after the plane crash, VTsIOM communications director Alexei Firsov said. "The terror attack theory did not prevail on the information space back then yet respondents were already inclined to prioritize it. We can definitely forecast an increase in this percentage in the upcoming days. On the whole, society that has historical memory of terrorism is inclined to link such catastrophes to this factor at the level of initial reaction," he said.

Kogalymavia's A321 en route from Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to St. Petersburg crashed during the 24th minute of its flight on October 31 in the north of the Sinai Peninsula. All 224 people onboard died in the crash. The plane was carrying citizens of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#27

Bloomberg

November 12, 2015

Russia Sees Syria War Endgame Stretch to 2017 as Talks Renew

By Jonathan Tirone and Henry Meyer

Russia will propose a political transition in Syria lasting as long as 18 months at the next round of talks starting Saturday in Vienna, where diplomats will resume the search for a settlement to the country's civil war.

Russia, which has entered the conflict on the side of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, will also seek United Nations backing for a wide coalition to carry out airstrikes against Islamic State militants, according to a draft proposal obtained by Bloomberg. The plan may encounter opposition from the U.S. and its allies, who say the Russian intervention is geared more toward propping up Assad than defeating the jihadists.

In the run-up to Saturday's meeting, European and U.S. diplomats, fresh off a two-year negotiation over Iran's nuclear program, have warned that there isn't a quick solution to the Syrian conflict. The war has already cost about 250,000 lives, sent millions fleeing the conflict zone and resulted in Europe's worst refugee crisis since World War II.

It was also a catalyst for the emergence of Islamic State, which set up its territory on an area straddling the Iraq-Syria border last year and grabbed more land later, including Iraq's Sinjar province, displacing as many as 200,000 people. The group captured thousands of minority Yazidis living there, including women.

Ahead of the Vienna meeting, more than 20,000 Kurdish Peshmerga guerrillas began a dawn offensive Thursday to liberate Sinjar from the militants, the Iraqi Kurdish news agency Rudaw said. The attack was coordinated with the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic



State, which carried out strikes against the group as the Kurdish fighters targeted Islamic State positions with heavy weapons, it added.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will be among the diplomats meeting to discuss Syria for the third time in three weeks. Other participants include Middle Eastern nations such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which have competing agendas in Syria.

#### Assad Future

While Assad's future is still a central and divisive issue at the talks, negotiators have tried to build cohesion by focusing on the need to stop Islamic State.

"Ministers stressed a need for constructive approaches and clear coordination of international efforts in fighting terrorism and assisting the quickest launch of an inter-Syrian political dialog," the Russian foreign ministry said Wednesday after a telephone call between Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Javad Zarif.

Zarif, whose attendance at a previous round marked a more prominent diplomatic role for Iran after the nuclear deal, won't be in Vienna this time, according to Iranian news agency Tasnim. Iran and Russia are Assad's main allies, while the U.S. and European Union nations say he must be replaced at some point, and Turkey and Saudi Arabia are more insistent on his early departure.

In cryptic remarks on Wednesday that appeared to target the Russian intervention, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that "those who carry wood to the fire in Syria won't be able to avoid finding themselves in that very same fire soon."

#### Bombing Campaign

In its eight-point proposal, Russia suggested forming a constitutional reform commission that would include opposition and regime representatives. Notably, Assad's presidential office wouldn't chair it, though nothing suggests he'd be barred from running in a presidential election after a referendum to adopt the new constitution. The proposal also says the presidential office would retain control of the army and foreign policy.

A Russian official, who asked not to be identified discussing the confidential negotiations, said Saudi and Turkish insistence that Assad step down or be overthrown continued to complicate attempts at a compromise. Both countries have given support to rebels fighting Syria's government, a loose collection of allies and rivals in which Islamist groups have come to dominate.

Russia is in its second month of a bombing campaign targeting Islamic State as well as some rebel groups that have received Western support. It wants Saturday's talks to produce one list that spells out which of the dozens of rebel groups in Syria are "terrorists" and should be targeted by airstrikes, and another that identifies opposition figures who could take part in a transition.

The request to identify acceptable opposition groups is awkward for the U.S., which abandoned an unsuccessful effort to train a "moderate" force to take on Islamic State. Providing detailed information is also sensitive to U.S. officials, who have expressed

concern that Russia might target those labeled American allies.

#### 'Eureka Moment'

U.K. Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond, who'll also be in Vienna, said Britain and its allies agree that "the sensible thing is to try and agree who is a terrorist and who's not," but said they have a different motivation than Russia.

"What we're trying to do is narrow the Russians' target set," Hammond told reporters at a breakfast meeting in Washington this week. While Moscow has agreed not to strike the Western-backed Free Syrian Army, "we're now looking to constrain them much further than that."

Ministers will discuss the mechanics of a cease-fire and the U.K. will propose confidence-building measures including prisoner exchanges and an end to barrel-bombing by Assad's army, Hammond said. While the U.S. hasn't outlined its approach to the latest meeting, Kerry is scheduled to do so in a speech in Washington on Thursday.

"We're not going to come out of one these meetings with a 'eureka' moment," Hammond said. "It's going to be a long process."

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#28

Wall Street Journal

November 12, 2015

Russian Proposal on Syria Fails to Gain Traction

Plan leaves fate of Assad unclear, sparking criticism from West

By FARNAZ FASSIHI at the United Nations and JAY SOLOMON in Washington

A proposal by Russia for a settlement of the conflict in Syria sparked criticism from Western and Arab officials concerned that it doesn't address President Bashar al-Assad's fate.

The proposal lists eight steps toward ending the conflict: establishing an 18-month constitutional reform period; creating a united delegation from the hodgepodge of opposition groups; identifying terrorist factions; coordinating international military strikes on Islamic State; and holding simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections.

But the proposal doesn't clarify how or when Mr. Assad might step down and leaves open the possibility that he could continue to rule Syria if he were to be re-elected.

"The problem with the Russian plan is that the transition is basically organized by Assad," said a Western diplomat at the United Nations. "We believe as it stands this plan gives way too much power to the Syrian government."

Russia on Wednesday played down the confidential proposal, which had been leaked to media a day earlier. Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, said that it served as the basis for an exchange of ideas.



The plan comes ahead of a conference this weekend in Vienna at which international powers will seek an agreement to start a political transition in Syria, including a cease-fire and an electoral timeline, according to U.S., European and Russian officials.

Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, will seek to nail down with Arab and European diplomats which Syrian political factions will be allowed to take part in the political process, and which will be defined as terrorist organizations. The latter group, including Islamic State, could be targeted by Russian and U.S. airstrikes, according to these officials.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said on Tuesday that he had seen the proposal and it would be a topic of conversation in Vienna. "But the details, the specifics, obviously remain to be worked out, both among the various stakeholders but also with the Syrian opposition themselves," said Mr. Toner.

The U.S. and Europe, as well as Syria's regional opponents such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have made Mr. Assad's exit a condition to peace talks.

"Any final agreement on the Syrian political process has to make clear that Assad must go," said a Western diplomat at the U.N.

Arab diplomats briefed on the Russian proposal said it almost certainly won't gain the support of countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey or Qatar, because it makes no mention of when Mr. Assad would leave office, though they said it was conceivable he could stay on during a transition.

Iran and Russia, which have helped bolster Syria's regime with financial and military support, maintain that popular elections should determine the next ruler of Syria. They haven't called for Mr. Assad's ouster.

The secretary of Iran's National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, said Wednesday that Iran and Russia have the same exact views on Syria and Mr. Assad's future, according to Iranian media.

The United Nations Security Council met to discuss Syria on Tuesday but Russia didn't bring up its proposal, according to diplomats who attended the closed-door meeting. They praised the talks in Vienna as positive but reiterated that none of the political efforts have so far had any impact on the ground in Syria.

-Nathan Hodge in Moscow contributed to this article.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#29

Syrian opposition confirms Russia's proposal on constitutional reform

MOSCOW, November 12. /TASS/. Qadri Jamil of Syria's People's Front for Change and Liberation confirmed on Thursday that Russia has made a proposal on the constitutional process in Syria that could take up to 1.5 years.

"Talking about some new Russian initiative is not quite correct. There are certain thoughts, for example, a proposal on the 1.5-year constitutional reform," Jamil said.

"These proposals do not cover all aspects of the Syrian problem. Some issues need further discussion," he added.

Russian Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov earlier dismissed western media reports that Moscow had drafted some document on the Syrian conflict resolution.

"This is not a document, we just have different ideas," he said. "This is not a whole plan or initiative."

Representatives of Syria's moderate opposition hope that the results of the Vienna negotiations on November 14 will make it possible to start substantive discussion on the time frame and place of the beginning of contacts between the delegations of the Syrian government and its opponents. They said as much in an interview with TASS on Thursday.

"So far, there were no contacts with the government. The main obstacle is the absence of the opposition delegation," said representative of the leadership of the Syrian Popular Front for Change and Liberation Qadri Jamil.

He added that the leading world and regional powers would focus on the composition of the opposition delegation in Vienna on November 14. "Russia submitted its own list of possible participants, Saudi Arabia - its own. As far as I know, Egypt has presented its list today," he said. "Some of the names in the lists are common. So I hope the issue will be resolved."

"After that we may hold talks, even Geneva-3," Qadri Jamil added.

Member of the executive committee of Syria's National Coordination Committee Mohammed Hijazi too linked the beginning of direct talks with the government to results of the forthcoming talks in Vienna. "Now we are following the talks in Vienna," he said. "There will be no Syrians there, but the meeting will focus on launching an inter-Syrian dialogue. So, we will have to wait for the results of the meeting. We expect that the Vienna talks will be followed by inter-Syrian contacts."

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#30

The Long War Journal

><http://www.longwarjournal.org><

November 11, 2015

Assad regime, allies break Islamic State's siege of air base in Aleppo

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN

Thomas Joscelyn is a Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and the Senior Editor for The Long War Journal.

The Syrian Army and allied forces have broken the Islamic State's siege of the Kweiris air base in Aleppo province, according to Bashar al Assad's regime and independent sources.



The "caliphate's" jihadists held their ground surrounding the air base for nearly two years, cutting off the Assad loyalists who were defending the facility from reinforcements. But in what is likely Assad's biggest success since Russia intervened in the war, the Islamic State has suffered significant losses in the villages and countryside surrounding the air base.

"Units of the army achieved new progress in the war against terrorism in [the] Aleppo eastern countryside reaching Kweiris airport and contacting...the heroic soldiers who have thwarted hundreds of attempts by ISIS [Islamic State] to attack the airport during the latest months," the Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), Assad's propaganda arm, reported. "During the operations carried out to lift the siege on the airport," SANA's account continued, "the army killed hundreds of ISIS terrorists and destroyed their dens and cells with all weapons inside."

Assad's men also claim to have "established control" over "tens of villages and strategic hills in the eastern countryside of Aleppo, the latest of which was the village of Sheikh Ahmad near the airport." SANA has published pictures from Sheikh Ahmad, saying the village was "recently secured by the Syrian Army." The fall of Sheikh Ahmad cleared the path for the Syrian military and its paramilitary allies to advance on Kweiris.

Russia's intervention apparently played a key role in the Syrian Army's ability to loosen the Islamic State's grip on the area. In late September, Assad's forces launched a large-scale ground operation intended to retake the turf surrounding the air base. Assad's military reportedly provided air cover using newly arrived Russian warplanes.

Russia conducted its own bombings outside of Kweiris as well. "Syrian troops tried in the past to reach the air base with no luck but Russian airstrikes appear to have helped in forcing [the Islamic State] from the area," the Associated Press (AP) reported.

According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Assad's soldiers have fought alongside Hezbollah jihadists, Syria's National Defense Forces (a collection of pro-Assad militias) and "Iranian fighters" as they made their way toward the air base. This combined ground force has also been supported by "airstrikes by the Russian and regime air forces."

At least eight Hezbollah fighters were killed during the push into Kweiris, according to The Daily Star, a publication based in Lebanon.

Harakat al Nujaba, an Iranian-backed militant organization that fights in Iraq and Syria, claims to have played a key role in operation. A post on Harakat al Nujaba's official website says that its fighters helped clear the Islamic State from Sheikh Ahmad and other villages surrounding the air base. Harakat al Nujaba has long maintained a presence in Aleppo, so its role in the most recent battle is not surprising.

The Islamic State actually gained ground in Aleppo during the first weeks of Russia's intervention. The group seized towns and villages from other rebel groups, which were Russia's primary targets. But while Russia has hit other rebels hard, it has also been targeting the Islamic State throughout the country.

As is the case elsewhere in Syria, the war in Aleppo province is a complex, multi-sided affair. In addition to the Islamic State, Sunni jihadist groups such as Al Nusra Front and Ahrar al Sham, both of which are opposed to the Islamic State, are heavily involved in the

fighting. In fact, Al Nusrah and Ahrar al Sham claim to have captured a small number of villages in the past week. Al Nusrah is al Qaeda's official branch in Syria, while Ahrar al Sham is closely allied with Al Nusrah and has its own al Qaeda links. In early July, the two groups formed the Ansar al Sharia alliance in Aleppo, but the coalition's current status is not clear.

Another coalition based in Aleppo, Fatah Halab, was also formed earlier this year. Fatah Halab was formed by more than two dozen rebel organizations, including Ahrar al Sham, Free Syrian Army brigades, and other Islamist groups. At its founding, the alliance explicitly excluded Al Nusrah.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#31

>www.aljazeera.com<

November 11, 2015

Free Syrian Army decimated by desertions

In Aleppo, the rebel group has weakened as fighters leave due to low pay, poor conditions and fragmentation.

By Adam Lucente and Zouhir Al Shimale

The FSA, once viewed as a viable alternative to the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has seen its power wane dramatically this year [AP]

Aleppo, Syria - In 2012, Mohammad Match joined the Free Syrian Army. A year later he deserted finding work at a fast-food restaurant in Aleppo.

"Five members of our family were with the FSA. Now two are in Turkey after getting injured and two are still with the FSA," he told Al Jazeera.

Match, 27, recalls other friends leaving as well. One of them, he said, "was forced to leave as a result of the inadequate salary, which was at best 18,000 Syrian pounds [\$95] a month". Match himself claims his salary started at only 8,000 Syrian pounds (\$36) a month, before rising slightly.

Ahmad Jalal, 21, a field commander in the FSA, admitted that the salaries "can be as low as \$50 a month, and sometimes salaries are not paid due to [lack of] support".

The FSA, once viewed by the international community as a viable alternative to the rule of the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has seen its power wane dramatically this year amid widespread desertions.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Aleppo, Syria's largest city where many FSA soldiers are leaving the group, citing inadequate pay, family obligations and poor conditions.

In the past month, Russia's bombing campaign against Syrian rebel groups and the FSA's rejection of Russian invitations to participate in negotiations have further weakened it, raising questions about the group's place in any future settlement.



On Wednesday, reports of a new Russian 'peace plan' were revealed. The eight-point proposal cites a constitutional reform process lasting 18 months that would be followed by presidential elections. According to the plan, 'certain Syrian opposition groups' should participate in the Vienna talks, expected to take place next Saturday.

Formed in August 2011 at the start of the Syrian civil war, the FSA comprises mainly defectors from the Syrian military. The group is viewed as moderate compared with the Islamist rebel groups that later emerged.

The FSA began suffering battlefield setbacks as early as 2013, including some to Islamist rebel groups in northern Syria. This prompted some members of the US House Intelligence Committee and the Obama administration to lose faith in the FSA.

A new US-backed alliance of rebel groups, called the Democratic Forces of Syria, was launched this year and only includes groups focused on fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which is waging war against both the regime and several rebel groups throughout Syria.

The new Democratic Forces of Syria alliance does not include the FSA, which is concentrating on fighting the Assad regime.

But observers say that US support has not yet waned.

"I don't think that the US has moved away from groups it has previously supported," said Ammar Waqqaf, a member of the British Syrian Society and a frequent media commentator on Syria.

However, its exclusion from the Democratic Forces of Syria may lead to further isolation for the FSA. Waqqaf noted that "the US badly needs someone on the ground whom it can support and could mount some sort of a serious challenge to ISIL, hence the formation of new groups, including the Democratic ones".

While no data exists on the number or rate of FSA desertions, Match speculates that 50 have left FSA units in the Aleppo area in 2015 alone. Fewer have defected this year due to the closing of the border with Turkey.

Other FSA fighters quit to provide for their families or because of the gruelling battlefield conditions.

"After the intensification of bombing in [Aleppo], fighters in bombed areas had to get their families out after injuries to them and shelling of their homes," explained Jalal, the field commander. "The fighter needs to feed his family and the amount [of his salary] is sometimes not enough to do so or live on."

Match recalled that days on the battlefield "would last 12 hours in cold conditions and with dust all over the place, after which we'd return to the base hungry. Then we'd go to sleep, get up and do it again the next day".

Match, for one, does not fear retribution from the FSA, and has lived outside their command for more than two years. The calm tone Jalal takes towards defected fighters demonstrates that retribution might not be of major concern.

The desertions have taken a toll on the FSA's strength. Determining the total number of FSA fighters is difficult, said Columb Strack, a senior Middle East and North Africa analyst at global information company IHS.

"The FSA is made up of more than 2,050 factions," he said. He estimates that FSA groups in southern Syria have about 35,000 fighters. He noted that estimates for northern FSA groups prove harder because the FSA "is so fragmented there".

Wayne White, a scholar at Washington's Middle East Institute and a former deputy director of the US state department's Middle East intelligence office, agrees. According to him, while the FSA's exact numbers are hard to determine, they are weaker than their Islamist counterparts.

"The FSA, compared with various other rebel groupings, such as ISIL, al-Nusra, and various moderate Islamist factions is relatively weak. The current total of FSA combatants in Syria is not precisely known," he told Al Jazeera.

FSA units vary greatly in their equipment and battle-readiness, Strack added. "There are small local factions armed with AK-47s, and other US-backed ones armed with tanks." Some FSA units, he said, consisted of "localised militias of 10 to 20 guys who don't move out of their village", while others are "much more capable factions of former officers".

Desertions from the FSA have been common in Aleppo and northern Syria more generally, where Islamist groups such as the Nusra Front, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda, are more powerful.

Wayne attributes the relative strength of Islamist rebels to better arms and funding, plus Western reluctance to fund rebels. "The US and the West became resistant to supplying secular rebels with large quantities of arms because they feared such arms could fall into extremist hands," he told Al Jazeera.

Moreover, he noted that the better funding, arms and strength of Islamist rebels had made "far more recruits - and even many moderate combatants - join such groups", since 2012, whereas the FSA is currently dealing with many desertions.

Some FSA-allied commanders agree that fragmentation is hurting the group and weakening its image in the eyes of the international community.

"We are not unified and therefore will not get stronger," said Suhaib, a commander in the Jaysh al-Islam coalition who declined to give his full name. "In my opinion, the international community's perspective that the FSA is weak and ineffective on the ground is because of the FSA's failure to unite all the factions."

Jaysh al-Islam is part of the Islamic Front, one of the main rebel groups and an ally of the FSA. It has acknowledged an alliance with the FSA, despite high tensions at times. Suhaib serves in one of their Aleppo area units.

A stalemate currently prevails in Aleppo, with no side making notable advances.

On Wednesday, however, the Syrian army achieved what many observers considered a



military breakthrough when it recaptured a northern military airbase that had been besieged by ISIL since 2013.

"Army and the armed forces eliminated large numbers of ISIL terrorists and make contact with the forces defending Kweires Airport in Aleppo's eastern countryside," the Syrian Arab News Agency said on Tuesday.

With no end in sight to the desertions and disunity, and attacks from both government and other rebel forces, the FSA faces challenging times ahead.

"If we don't work together," declared Suhaib, "we'll die together".

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#32

Moscow Times

November 12, 2015

After the Crash: What Are Russia's Options in Syria?

By Matthew Bodner

If the ongoing investigation into the downing of a Russian civilian airliner over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula on Oct. 31 concludes that a bomb destroyed the plane, the Kremlin will have to react - but its options are constrained by logistical and political realities on the ground.

So far, it appears that President Vladimir Putin and his administration have not decided how they want to spin the disaster. After initially dismissing the possibility of a terrorist attack, motivated by Russia's intervention in the Syrian conflict, the government has suspended all flights to the Sinai.

"The likelihood of a terrorist attack, naturally, remains one of the reasons this could have happened," Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev told newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta on Tuesday, explaining the decision to suspend flights.

According to Russian political analyst Yury Barmin, "it is relatively easy to convince Russians now that an alleged terrorist act is a sign of how effective air strikes have been, and that they can't stop when victory is one step away."

But Russia's air campaign, though impressive in several ways, has not yet succeeded in turning the tide in favor of embattled Syrian President Bashar Assad, who requested Putin's support in his 4 1/2 year struggle against a wide array of rebel and militant groups opposing his rule.

Meanwhile, Russian society has become increasingly polarized by the campaign. A Levada Center poll released late last month found that 53 percent of respondents supported Putin's policy in Syria, while 22 percent opposed it. The number of undecideds had dropped by half from September to 24 percent.

Though analysts said that the Russian government does not respond to public pressure on foreign policy, a significant shift in public opinion could put the Kremlin in an awkward position if Russians begin calling for a ground offensive or outright withdrawal.

The core of Putin's dilemma is that his military isn't capable of supporting a larger operation in Syria, especially one involving ground forces. He is likewise politically unable to pull out of Syria. Though he could pursue cooperation with the Western coalition, it would require a shift in strategy.

"Introducing ground troops in any meaningful numbers would be dangerous and, frankly, difficult for a Russia whose out-of-area logistics capabilities are already overstretched," said Mark Galeotti, an expert in Russian military and security affairs at New York University.

"Withdrawal is not yet an option and there's little real scope for more cooperation [with the Western coalition in Syria]," he said, arguing the Kremlin's next move is likely more of the same, with a few flashy cruise missiles launched from the Caspian Sea "duly packaged on Russian TV as a fitting and devastating revenge, but no lasting or major change to strategy."

#### No Good Options

Although it is possible that Putin could use the Sinai tragedy to mobilize the Russian public in support of a large-scale ground operation in Syria, his ability to do this would be greatly limited by logistical shortcomings as well as potential for severe public backlash if things went wrong.

Russia currently has deployed in Syria about 50 aircraft flying air support missions for Assad and conducting air strikes on positions held by groups standing in opposition to him. There have also been reports that Russia has deployed a very limited number of ground forces to Syria.

"Russia's problem is that they cannot surge and cannot sustain logistically a large-scale ground operation. ... 5,000 men is their limit and they need 20,000 to 30,000 new troops for [an Assad] offensive to succeed," said international affairs expert Vladimir Frolov.

Even if Russia was able to surge in such numbers, it would be a hard sell to the Russian public, which is willing to go along with anything the state media says until there is a direct impact on their lifestyles - say, reservists being called to fight in Syria - Frolov argued.

A second option, seeking closer coordination with the Western-led anti-ISIS operation also bombing targets in Syria, would be difficult in that it would require a change in strategy in Syria to align with the Western coalition against Assad - undermining the Russian operation's stated justification.

Barmin said a slight escalation of Russia's force strength is most likely, but that "it is still unlikely that we are going to see a ground operation in Syria, it seems that it would be a recipe for tragedy."

According to Mikhail Barabanov, the editor-in-chief of Moscow Defense Brief, a monthly magazine published by the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, a local defense think tank, any Russian escalation in the conflict would be limited.

"It is possible that Moscow will have to increase the size of its air force grouping in Syria,



and deploy limited numbers of 'technical' ground troops - artillery units, missile troops, etc. - in a similar style to the Soviet participation in the Spanish Civil War," Barabanov said.

Regardless of the policy choice, Frolov argued, "public opinion will stay right where the Kremlin wants it. ... There is no demand for accountability on foreign policy, and the Kremlin is pretty much free to act as it sees fit."

Karina Papiya of the Levada Center said that Russian public opinion can be expected to grow increasingly polarized over the Syria conflict, but that a terrorist attack would only contribute to growing sentiment that Russia is "a besieged fortress" forced to respond to threats from abroad, giving Putin more room to maneuver in Syria.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#33

Financial Times

November 12, 2015

Putin should make Assad an offer he can't refuse

By Simon Saradzhyan

Simon Saradzhyan is a research fellow at Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Advice.

To hear some Russia watchers say it, Vladimir Putin will fight to the last Russian air bomb to keep Bashar al-Assad of Syria in power. But will he?

I argue not only that Putin could and should let Assad go, but also that Putin's own record of behind-the-door diplomacy offers a clue as to how the Syrian dictator could step aside without losing face.

When it became clear that George Bush Jr and his coalition of the willing were going to invade Iraq, Putin sent Yevgeny Primakov, one of Russia's savviest statesmen, to Bagdad to make an offer to Saddam Al-Hussein: resign from presidency, but stay on as leader of the Baath party. Saddam refused the offer and the rest is history.

It happens that Assad, too, is not only president of Syria but also leader of his own Baath party. And Putin has much more leverage over Assad now than he did over Saddam before the second Iraq war. So perhaps Assad would pay more attention if Putin were to make such an offer now.

There are several reasons why Putin would want to do so. The most important requires an understanding of the very serious threat that a persistence of the Islamic State (Isis) and al-Qaeda in Syria would pose to Russia's national security.

Although criticized for lacking a long-term strategy in Syria, Putin is not so short-sighted as to fail to see that restoration of the status quo ante in Syria is impossible. No matter how much land Assad's armed forces may regain with Russia's air support - they have lost control of five sixths of the national territory so far - the Syrian state stands little chance of survival in its official borders if Assad stays in power. Alawites constitute less than 15 per

cent of the Syrian population and they cannot realistically impose their will on the Sunni majority.

Putin realizes that either Assad's government will be replaced by a coalition, in which all major religious and ethnic groups including Sunnis, Alawites, Kurds, Christians and other minorities are represented, or there is a good chance that the bad guys from Al-Qaeda and Isis, who outnumber and outgun the moderate opposition, will prevail and take over most of Syria.

In pre-9/11 Afghanistan, the Taliban hosted Al-Qaeda. In Syria it may get to the point at which Al-Qaeda and Isis will play the hosts. Russia cannot put up with the reality of these organisations permanently controlling all of Syria or any part of it, given that Isis has proclaimed a 'province' in Russia's North Caucasus, attracted more than 2,000 Russian nationals to its ranks and, most recently, claims to have downed a Russian airliner over Sinai.

Al-Qaeda, which has long maintained ties to violent groups in the North Caucasus, has also vowed to attack Russia. Both Al-Qaeda and Isis have shown practical interest in acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

In my view, prevention of the complete failure of the Syrian state, which would turn it into a long-term haven for militant Islamists who have vowed to attack Russia, constitutes the primary Russian national interest at stake in Syria. Other interests are as follows:

- Maintaining Russia's military presence in Syria, including the naval facility at Tartus, to ensure, among other things, the permanent presence of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea, something that Russia's new Maritime Doctrine explicitly calls for.

- Preserving access of Russian companies to Syria's market to ensure that the country continues to buy Russian-made arms and machinery, ensuring at least some degree of diversification of Russia's economy, largely driven by the oil and gas sectors.

- Ensuring that Russia's reputation as a reliable protector of its allies (in the eyes of the latter) is not damaged by a forceful removal of Assad from power.

In addition to these national interests, members of Russia's ruling elite have a collective interest in the prevention of forceful regime change or any kind of revolution, as they fear such events could become precedents for other countries, including Russia.

Assad has served all these interests rather well but he cannot serve them much longer. It is almost certain that he won't re-establish control over all of Syria and there is a very good chance he will lose what territory he controls at the moment. Russia can live with a Syria without Assad, as long as his successor is chosen through negotiations in which the Kremlin has a say, followed by elections, rather than through use of force, and provided the new leadership honours Russia's aforementioned interests.

There have been multiple signs that Russian leaders no longer think their country's interests in the Middle East hinge on Assad's presidency and that they are prepared for a transition to a representative coalition government in Syria.

When asked on October 17 whether Syria's next government must be headed by Assad, Russian premier Dmitry Medvedev replied "No, absolutely not". Putin summoned Assad to Moscow on October 20 to secure his consent not only to hold early elections in Syria, but



also to allow Russian warplanes to provide air support for moderate rebels. The two also discussed what Putin defined as a "long-term settlement based on a political process that involves all political forces, ethnic and religious groups".

Isis and al-Qaeda do not pose a threat to Russia alone. The US, the European Union and their allies in the Middle East cannot live with a partitioned Syria if any parts of it are controlled by Isis and/or Al-Qaeda. Isis counts in its ranks some 4,500 nationals of western countries, including up to 700 Britons. FBI director James Comey has recently been quoted as saying that Isis poses the greatest danger to the US homeland. Isis has also been reported to have planned attacks in Europe and some of its followers have succeeded in their plans.

Even if Isis posed no significant threat to Russia or to western countries, it should still be their obligation before the international community to battle it. A violent organisation whose members bury opponents alive, rape children and kill people on a massive scale just because they practice a different form of Islam, let alone other religions, constitutes a pure evil that Russia, the US, the EU and their allies are obliged to fight. Dismantling of Isis should supersede any past political acrimony between western countries and Russia as well as any short-term expediciencies of domestic politics.

The agreements on Syria's chemical weapons and Iran's nuclear programme have demonstrated that Russian and western countries can negotiate win-win solutions on issues of high importance not only for themselves but also for the entire international community. It is my hope that recently revived diplomatic efforts, involving these countries, their allies and Iran, will enable the emergence of a representative and responsible government in Syria, while the likes of Isis and al-Qaeda will be defeated not only in Syria but also in Iraq.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#34

Moscow Times

November 12, 2015

Putin Is Achieving His Goals in Syria

By Josh Cohen

Josh Cohen is a former USAID project officer involved in managing economic reform projects in the former Soviet Union. He is a business development professional and also contributes to a number of foreign policy-focused media outlets.

As Russia's bombing campaign in Syria drags on, Western commentators increasingly portray President Vladimir Putin's Syrian campaign as a disaster. Many suggest that military engagement could trap Russia in an Afghanistan-style quagmire.

The U.S. Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, added that Putin is "winging it" in Syria, questioning "whether he has some long-term strategy or whether he is being very opportunistic on a day-to-day basis." Meanwhile, longtime Russia hawk Edward Lucas writes that Putin's Syrian intervention is a lost cause anyway, since "the likelihood of restoring the Bashar Assad regime in control over a stable and united Syria is minimal."



These assertions all overlook a key fact though: Putin is well on the way to achieving the majority of his objectives in the Levant. What are Putin's objectives in Syria and how are they being met? To start with, it's important to understand that what Putin fears most is chaos, noting in his recent United Nations speech that the American focus on regime change had produced "destruction of national institutions," and created a power vacuum "which immediately started to be filled with extremists and terrorists."

However, the Russian intervention is not about restoring Syrian President Bashar Assad's control over a "stable and unified" Syria, but rather to preserve a functioning Syrian state - preferably one that can also protect Russia's interests in Syria.

For this reason, during the first several weeks the Russian air strikes concentrated on preventing insurgents from making further inroads in key regime areas of control, notably the Alawite coastal heartland plus the key corridor along Syria's M5 roadway linking Damascus to Homs, Hama and Northern Syria. As it so happened, these areas are besieged by non-Islamic State rebels, and as a result, the majority of Russian air sorties did not target the Islamic State.

While Assad's forces and their Shiite allies have not re-conquered large amounts of territory, at a bare minimum they have stopped the bleeding and stabilized the regime's position. In this respect, the Russian military campaign has - at least for now - achieved its first objective.

The second objective of Putin's Syrian campaign is to reassert Russian power in the Middle East. Again, there are early signs of success. The Russian military has established a number of bases in the Alawite heartland, preserved the Black Sea fleet's access to the Syrian port of Tartus, and now has the ability to project power throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

More broadly, Russia has also succeeded in cementing a military relationship with the leading Shiite powers in the Middle East - namely Iran, Iraq, Hezbollah and the rump Assad regime. The parties established two command centers - one in Baghdad and one in Damascus - and now constitutes a potentially formidable Middle Eastern axis. For the first time since Egyptian President Anwar Sadat booted Soviet forces from Egypt in 1973, Russia is firmly ensconced in the Middle East.

Putin's message to the U.S. is clear: We are again a Middle East power to be reckoned with and we're not going away.

Putin's third objective has been to use Russia's Syrian intervention to move the conversation away from Ukraine and force the West to again engage with him. Once again, Putin is seeing early signs of success.

After long demanding that "Assad must go," the Obama administration now appears willing to countenance some kind of transition period where Assad would remain in place. In addition, Russian diplomats in Vienna are locked in negotiations with their counterparts from the United States and other countries discussing Syria's future. Meanwhile, senior Russian and American defense officials are once again speaking to each other in order to avoid an unforeseen clash between their respective air forces in the skies above Syria. The U.S. may not like Putin's Syrian intervention, but Washington and Moscow are once again



talking.

While it may be a stretch, the possibility exists that Putin could use his Syrian campaign to force the West to end its Ukraine-related economic sanctions. The U.S. is unlikely to countenance a direct Syria for Ukraine trade-off, but it's not beyond the realm of possibility that Europeans might at least consider this scenario, albeit not explicitly.

European Union countries are increasingly split on sanctions anyway, and a desire to mitigate the refugee crisis plus European business interests could push EU countries to find a face-saving way to wind down the sanctions regime. While this is more a Russian "stretch goal" for now, Putin succeeded in using his Syrian campaign to pierce the diplomatic isolation imposed on Russia by the West.

To be clear, the Russian military intervention is in its early innings, and when it comes to war many things can go wrong. In particular, the recent plane crash in Egypt could sour the Russian public on Russia's Syrian intervention, and the Assad regime could resume losing ground to rebel forces.

Nevertheless, six weeks after the Russian air force struck its first targets, it looks like Putin's bold Syrian gambit has begun to achieve its goals.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#35

>www.rt.com<

November 11, 2015

'Russia's campaign against terrorists in Syria inciting retaliation'

There can be no negotiation with ISIS because their intent is just to invade and continue their violence, says Catherine Shakdam, from the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies in London.

Twenty-three people were killed and at least 65 injured on Monday in the Syrian city of Latakia after militants fired mortars near a university and a bus stop.

RT: The suggestion from Syria is that the Al-Nusra Front carried out this attack. Is that what you think?

Catherine Shakdam: There is a possibility, of course. Militants have received immense aid over the past few months, the so-called moderates... And I think that Russia's intervention in Syria and the systematic targeting of radicals' bases and ability to carry out such attacks have been damaged and therefore they are trying to retaliate. I think that the main idea that needs to be taken from this is that they are targeting again a religious minority, and they are targeting the Alawites who are mainly supporters of President Bashar Assad in Syria.

That means to me that we have now radicals going after Assad's political support system and then trying to use civilians to do that. Now what I found very interesting is that it comes at such a time when Washington is increasingly calling for the deposition of Assad and

trying to see how they can angle their intervention in Syria to target Damascus and the central government. I find it very critical and very interesting to see that in [yesterday's] attack is in essence achieving just that.

RT: How big a threat is Al-Nusra in the region? How does it compare to ISIL?

CS: A lot of the time people tend to say that there are less radical among the radicals in that they are less bloody and bloodthirsty. ISIS has a liking for a grand display of violence, beheadings and such. I think that Al-Nusra is a bit different in that radicals stay radicals - the ideology that they are basing their ideology upon is violence... based on hatred and ignorance.

RT: We've heard reports of members of so-called 'moderate' groups trained by the US joining the ranks of Al-Nusra. Is that an inevitable outcome?

CS: ... I think we need to be very careful as to who we call 'moderates,' because then we are basically allowing ourselves to think that radicalism can be somehow justified or tolerated, and that is not the case; it should never be the case. The only way forward would be exactly what Moscow has been doing and Iran calling for - which is the annihilation of the ideology itself, and of course targeting the military ability on the ground.

There could be no negotiation, or try to open up negotiations, with such people, because their intent is just to invade and continue their violence, and this is what they have been doing. Whenever the US or Western allies have allowed them some space within which they could move they have carried such attacks and... systematically targeted civilians. We can't allow them. We have to suffocate these people. And that means cutting their phones, cutting off their military aid, and of course trying to target the ideology. I don't think that we could think in terms of trying to contain this - this is not containable now, we need to really attack it. I think that Russia understand this and so far has been doing a great job, which is why they are retaliating right now - because they are feeling a danger.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#36

Moscow Times

November 12, 2015

West and Russia Must Cooperate on More Than Terrorism

By Georgy Bovt

Georgy Bovt is a political analyst.

With terrorism now the most likely cause of the plane crash that occurred over the Sinai last week, the authorities have halted all air service between Russia and Egypt and ordered the evacuation of tens of thousands of Russian tourists.

Some suspect that the Russian authorities took no steps to increase security measures following the start of their bombing campaign in Syria. Observers might excuse this lapse by pointing out that European countries, whose citizens frequent Egyptian resorts in even greater numbers, also had not taken such steps. However, it was a Russian plane that crashed, not theirs, and if more than 200 Europeans had died, the same question would be directed at those governments.



Confirmation that a terrorist attack was responsible for the crash could have a massive impact on Russia's domestic and foreign policy. For example, in response to the tragedy in the North Caucasus city of Beslan, the authorities "suddenly" banned direct gubernatorial elections and put other civil processes "on hold." Current events will prove to be not only the next milestone in Russia's downhill slide into a war on terror in the Middle East and beyond, but will also deepen this country's isolation from the "hostile" outside world and push it into a dangerous impasse with the West.

Russia must find a balance between the two extremes of a Soviet-like isolation from the world and close cooperation with the West on vital issues. That balance will affect both the country's domestic life and economy: Either it will slide further into a "mobilization model" even as the government displays an obvious inability to manage such a system, or else it will liberate the forces of openness and freedom that are needed, at least to some extent, for economic growth. In short, Russia faces a very difficult task.

The main paradox of the near future is that Russia will find it increasingly difficult to maintain economic and social stability as its anti-Western brand of isolationism excludes the possibility of the very interaction with the West needed to achieve those goals. Cooperation on the fight against terrorism is not enough. It is difficult to say when, and even if, leaders will ever find a new balance. However, time for that search is rapidly running out and Moscow has no ready solution other than upping the ante in the Syria game or maintaining the tension over Ukraine.

The fight against international terrorism requires much closer, and more sincere cooperation between Russia and the West than currently exists. President Vladimir Putin decided to stop all flights to Egypt after his conversation with British Prime Minister David Cameron. Obviously, Cameron presented arguments that convinced Putin to follow the example of many other European countries. It is unlikely that British intelligence knew in advance of the attack or could have warned their Russian colleagues.

However, there is no denying that, even in the past, cooperation between Russian and Western - primarily with the U.S. and British - intelligence agencies left a lot to be desired, but now such cooperation has practically ground to a halt over the situation in Ukraine. Will it become more constructive, particularly for fighting the Islamic State, or will the "limited openness" concerning the recent air disaster remain a fleeting gesture by the former G8 partner? The same question applies to Russia's interactions with the U.S. Russian intelligence agencies requested, and are apparently receiving assistance from the FBI in investigating the cause of the crash and the possible use of explosives onboard.

In this way, Russia's military intervention in Syria might indeed lead to a new "post-Ukrainian" agenda between Moscow and the West.

Of course, counter-terrorism could become the basis for constructive cooperation, but only in the context of positive relations on a wider range of issues. And for that, the West would have to find a way to tolerate the Putin regime and Russia would have to abandon its fervent anti-Western rhetoric, no matter how much it views Western values as "morally unacceptable." Both sides will obviously face a major task in reaching that middle ground. However, no "cooperation on counter-terrorism measures" is possible otherwise.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)



#37

Russia Beyond the Headlines/Kommersant

>www.rbth.ru<

November 11, 2015

Egypt air disaster: If terrorists to blame, did they have double aim?

Egyptian authorities said on Nov. 9 that they had killed one of the leaders of local terrorist group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, which UK media report is responsible for bringing down the Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula on Oct. 31. Russian observers believe that if the accident was really a terrorist act, its perpetrators may have been trying to attack not only Russia, but also the Egyptian leadership.

By Olga Kuznetsova

The Egyptian authorities have made a breakthrough in their fight against Islamists from the Ansar Beit al-Maqdis group fighting on the Sinai Peninsula, which has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS) radical militant group.

On Nov. 9, Cairo reported it had killed one of the commanders of this grouping - Ashraf Ali Ali Hassanein al-Gharabli. According to Egyptian security officials, Gharabli was involved in organizing a string of terrorist attacks, including against civilians and foreign tourists.

The elimination of one of the country's most wanted terrorists has coincided with the investigation of the Russian aircraft crash over Sinai. In particular, British daily The Times, citing unnamed sources in the government, has not only confirmed that the plane was the target of a terrorist attack, but also identified its perpetrators.

According to the newspaper's source, the act was carried out by militants with the Ansar Beit al-Maqdis group, which has declared itself the Sinai branch of ISIS - Wilayat Sinai.

"There are a total of more than two dozen ISIS exclaves in the world now, and Wilayat Sinai is one of them," said Alexander Ignatenko, director of the Institute of Religion and Politics.

"Such enclaves tend to make their own decisions about the acts they commit, but do it with a statement in favor of the 'central organization'."

Ignatenko, however, is convinced that the conclusions of the direct participation of Wilayat Sinai in the preparation of a potential terrorist attack on board the Russian plane are premature.

"The situation with terrorists fighting in Sinai is not so clear; what happened could have been conceived not only by the members of this group, but by its agents - those who are directly or indirectly cooperating with the Wilayat," he said.

Among these "agents" Ignatenko named the key opponents of Egypt's incumbent president Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi - the Muslim Brotherhood, removed from power in a coup in 2013.

After the bloody crackdown of the Muslim Brothers' demonstrations on Rabia Square in Cairo, supporters of this movement were driven underground, where they continued fighting against Sisi's secular regime.



At the same time, Russia has established a close partnership with the Egyptian leader, and earlier this year, Moscow put the Muslim Brotherhood on the list of terrorist organizations banned in Russia - alongside ISIS.

Consequently, if the cause of the crash of the Russian airliner was indeed a terrorist act, the target of the organizers could have been not only Russia, but also the Egyptian leadership.

Ignatenko did not rule out that the "terrorist" theory of the crash in the sky over the Sinai may be related to the plans to involve Egypt - as a key Sunni state in the region - in international efforts to fight against ISIS.

"For the success of the Moscow-backed initiative of settlement in Syria, Egypt's participation is vital," he said.

Alexei Malashenko, an analyst from the Moscow Carnegie Center, admits that the tragedy in the sky over the Sinai has dealt a huge blow to Sisi's position, depriving the Egyptian economy of billions of dollars of tourism revenue.

However, he doubts that the attack was organized by Ansar Beit al-Maqdis militants or supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

"It would be logical to imagine that it was Islamists fighting in Syria who decided to harm Russia. They have every reason to seek revenge against Moscow," he said.

First published in Russian in Kommersant

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#38

>www.thedailybeast.com<

November 12, 2015

U.S. Baffled by Russian Jet 'Bombing'

By Shane Harris

Investigators still can't figure out how Metrojet 9268 was taken down-leading some U.S. intelligence officials to believe that militants used a novel or previously unseen bomb.

In the absence of any definitive evidence that an explosive device brought down Russian Metrojet 9268 last month over Egypt's Sinai, U.S. intelligence and security officials have been debating a number of competing theories about how the plane crashed, including that ISIS militants may have used a novel or previously unseen device that has made it harder for investigators to find forensic evidence of a bomb.

Among the theories U.S. officials are considering is that the bomb may have been placed near a fuel line on the doomed Airbus jet, and that it was just large enough to ignite a fire using the fuel in the aircraft's tanks, two sources familiar with internal discussions told The Daily Beast.

If that was the case, it's possible that investigators might not find tell-tale explosive residue that would prove a bomb had been detonated, the sources said, requesting anonymity in order to discuss sensitive information related to the ongoing investigation of the crash.

But others see evidence of a more traditional attack.

A former senior U.S. official who was shown an investigation photograph of the wreckage told The Daily Beast that a portion of the underside of the plane shows small, quarter-sized holes and looked like something had blown out of the plane from the inside.

This information led the former official to conclude that the jet was brought down by improvised explosive device, possibly packed with nails and other shrapnel to blow as big a hole in the side of the plane as possible. From there, the plane could have broken up in mid-air, which is about the only thing U.S. officials are sure happened, since the wreckage is spread over a vast area.

Advertisement

The former official spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss confidential information that was shared with him from the investigation.

The lack of any concrete evidence has frustrated U.S. officials, who are trying to piece together a narrative from a continent away. They also still cannot rule out a major structural failure. The tail of the aircraft had been damaged during a hard landing in Cairo in 2001.

The slow pace and lack of transparency in the investigation also underscored how dependent crash investigators are on evidence collected at the scene. Egyptian officials are leading the investigation, but U.S. officials expressed little confidence in how they're running the scene.

"Information from the Egyptians on the investigation is coming out rather slowly," a U.S. official told The Daily Beast, attributing the paucity of sharing both to the Egyptians' lack of technical sophistication and their unwillingness to conclude that this was an attack against tourism, one of the key pillars of the national economy. The Metrojet flight originated at Egypt's Sharm el Sheikh airport, a resort area that is frequented by foreign travelers and that authorities have long said was beyond the reach of Islamic militants in Sinai.

By now, investigators arguably should have had answers. It took forensic specialists eight days to be certain that Pan Am Flight 103 was brought down by a bomb over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, after they found residues on the plane's debris that "positively identified and are consistent with the use of a high-performance plastic explosive," investigators said at the time.

But 11 days have passed since the Metrojet crash with no hint that any forensic evidence has been found.

On Tuesday, the Egyptian foreign minister told CNN that the government had approved applications by the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board, which investigates all aviation accidents involving American planes, to come to Egypt and examine the wreckage.



But an NTSB spokesman told The Daily Beast on Wednesday that, according to the board's head of aviation safety, the Egyptians have still not reached out and said that the investigators can come.

The FBI has personnel serving in Cairo, but they are not at the crash site, nor have they been invited.

"The FBI has offered forensic assistance and other services to our partners in Egypt and Russia, and stands ready to assist," Joshua Campbell, a bureau spokesperson, said in a statement.

A senior Defense Department official told The Daily Beast that without access to the crash site, investigators have been forced to rely largely on satellite intelligence and speculation. The official said suspicion that the plane was probably brought down by a bomb is based largely on thermal imagery detected from a satellite that suggests a massive explosion, likely the result of jet fuel igniting.

That might argue in favor of the fuel-line theory. But if that was the case, it's also not clear why the wings of the doomed jet appear to be largely intact, based on crash scene photos. The wings are badly charred and inverted, which suggests that the plane landed on its back. But they were not blown away.

A senior U.S. intelligence official did said that if a bomb did bring down the plane, it was almost certainly not placed there by a passenger. Instead, attention has focused on ground crew at the airport with access to the airplane when it was preparing for its flight to St. Petersburg.

The Associated Press reported this week that "security checks were often lax at a gate into the facility used to bring in food and fuel," citing security officials at the airport.

"Sharm el Sheikh is a tourist airport geared towards tourism. Many times secondary airports do not have the level of security found at the larger international airports," security consultant John Halinski, the former deputy administrator of the Transportation Security Administration, told The Daily Beast. Helsinki also ran TSA's overseas airport inspections earlier in his career.

"I have always been concerned with the insider threat in this region, especially with a group like ISIS that radicalizes over the Internet," Helsinki added. "Generally screening and vetting of employees in this region occur only once every few years."

-with additional reporting by Kim Dozier, Kate Brannen, and Nancy A. Youssef

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#39

Irrussianality

><https://irrussianality.wordpress.com><

November 10, 2015

RUSSIA INVADES IRAN AND IRAQ

By Paul Robinson

This month, the attention of the world is on Russian military operations in Syria. But this is not the first time that Russian forces have intervened in the Middle East. One hundred years ago today (10 November 1915), troops of the Russian Expeditionary Corps under General N. N. Baratov landed at the northern Persian port of Enzeli at the start of a campaign which eventually saw some of them enter Iraq. Generally ignored by histories of the First World War, the Russian invasion was part of a series of events which eventually resulted in Persia possibly losing a greater percentage of its population than any other country during the war (in large part due to famine in 1917-19).

Persia was neutral, but became the battlefield for competing foreign powers - the Ottoman Empire, Germany, Britain, and Russia. The Ottomans and Germans hoped to persuade Persia to abandon its neutrality and join them, providing a launchpad for jihad into Central Asia and Afghanistan, and from there, it was hoped, even into India. To this end, in 1915 German agents spread out through Persia buying support for an uprising against the government. In Isfahan, a pro-German group murdered the Russian vice-consul in May 1915, and by autumn 1915 the situation in that city was so dangerous that Europeans (apart from Germans and Austrians) had to leave. Meanwhile, in Shiraz German supporters attacked and imprisoned the British consul, while the British and Russian consuls in Kermanshah were forced to flee. By October 2015, Persia seemed to be about to fall into German hands.

It was to prevent this from happening that the Viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, ordered General Baratov to invade Persia. His logic was akin to an early-20th century version of the infamous 'domino theory'. Events in Persia were damaging Russia's reputation, and if nothing was done unrest might spread. The Grand Duke explained the purpose of Baratov's mission in the following way:

"The significance of the corps consists of raising our prestige in Persia. ... The attitude to the Persian civilian population must be very benevolent and, as a true guarantee of this, troops must pay the population for everything that they acquire at prices which are satisfactory to the population."

Similarly, Nikolai Nikolaevich told Baratov that, 'Until the Persians declare war on us, the task of the forces now concentrated in Persia consists of raising the prestige of Russia's name. The attitude to the Persian population must be very friendly.'

On 25 November 1915, after Persian gendarmes mutinied in Hamadan, the Grand Duke ordered Baratov to seize that city and suppress the mutiny. Baratov took Hamadan on 15 December, and from there marched on the holy city of Qom, which he took on 20 December. The Grand Duke gave Baratov strict instructions not to do anything in Qom which could lead to accusations that the Russians were insulting Islam. Next, on 26 February 1916, the Russian Corps entered Kermanshah, and on 19 March it captured Isfahan. With this, Russia's strategic objectives were fulfilled, as the German threat in Persia was entirely eliminated.

The next step was not so successful. The British Army had managed to get itself surrounded in Kut-al-Amara in Mesopotamia. On 1 April, the Grand Duke ordered Baratov to advance towards Baghdad in order to pull Ottoman forces away from Kut and help the British. Ten days later, Baratov reached the town of Khanaqin (nowadays just on the Iraqi



side of the Iran-Iraq border), but in the face of a large Ottoman force, he had to withdraw back into Persia, where his forces remained until they left after the revolution of 1917. In the end, it was the British who became the dominant power in Persia after the war. Russia was left with nothing for its efforts.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#40

Russia Beyond the Headlines

>www.rbth.ru<

November 12, 2015

The U.S. electoral match-up the Kremlin elite would like to see

Although the U.S. presidential election is still more than a year away, the candidates have said enough about Russia to give some insights into where U.S.-Russia relations are likely to go.

By Bryan MacDonald

Bryan MacDonald is a Moscow-based Irish journalist who focuses on Russia's role in international geopolitics.

If Russia's leaders could vote, they'd probably back Trump for the Republicans and anybody but Clinton on the Democratic ticket.

If the Kremlin elite could cast a ballot in a U.S. presidential election, it would probably relish the chance to vote for Donald Trump. In the real world, however, things are far more complicated. What does the current election season mean for future relations between Washington and Moscow?

Casual observers could be forgiven for imagining that the United States has a semipermanent election cycle. With still more than 13 months to go before Barack Obama relinquishes the White House, it already feels like the campaign has dragged on for an eternity. Russians can only marvel at the showbiz-style U.S. election process.

An American iron lady?

Bill Clinton remains popular in Russia. Rightly or wrongly, he's perceived as having been less hostile to the country than his two successors, George W. Bush and Obama. Although his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, is now the bookmaker's odds-on favorite to take the Democratic nomination, Hillary is not Bill and times have changed. It's impossible to imagine the former Secretary of State laughing and joking with Vladimir Putin as her husband used to do with Boris Yeltsin. In fact, Mrs. Clinton is regarded as a hardliner on Russia. Indeed, she's criticized Barack Obama's handling of the Ukraine crisis and proposed far stronger measures to support Kiev.

Of course, Clinton's position might well be pre-election bluster, designed to cast her as a strong figure. Hoping to become the first female president, Clinton probably feels that she has to appear even tougher than her male opponents at times. In that regard, she's borrowing from the playbook of Angela Merkel and Margaret Thatcher, two phenomenally successful female leaders. The Kremlin naturally fears that a new Clinton presidency would be far more hawkish than the previous Clinton administration.

## The elephants in the room

Currently, Marco Rubio is the long-term favorite in the race for the Republican nomination. The 44-year-old Florida senator is potentially even tougher on Russia than John McCain, a notorious tormentor of Putin's government. In fact, Rubio, who has strong links to the Tea Party movement, has even won support from former McCain donors such as George Seay and Jim Rubright, according to Fox News.

In May, Rubio penned a Politico op-ed in which he called for further NATO expansion, including the accession of Ukraine. The Kremlin would welcome that like it would greet snow in July. Responding to the idea that NATO might send military advisors to Ukraine, Alexander Grushko, Russia's envoy to the Atlantic Alliance, told news agency Tass that "Moscow will take all measures, including military-technical, to neutralize (the) possible threat from (a) NATO presence in Ukraine."

Most analysts agree that should full NATO membership for Ukraine be proposed, Moscow's reaction would be less than pleasant.

NATO expansion may be the one topic of agreement between Rubio and his former mentor Jeb Bush, who may yet make an impact in the race. Bush views Putin as a "bully" and has called for larger troop deployments to the NATO-member Baltic states.

## Trumping them all?

Then there's Trump himself. Although the billionaire's candidacy was originally viewed as a joke, nobody's laughing now. While odds-makers continue to mark him an outsider, the majority of Republican voters currently consider him the best candidate for the November 2016 election.

Trump believes "Putin has eaten Obama's lunch" on Ukraine. "Putin has no respect for our president whatsoever," Trump told Fox News. "He's got a tremendous popularity in Russia, they love what he's doing, they love what he represents."

Earlier, at a press conference in Scotland, Trump said: "I'd get along very well with Vladimir Putin".

Of course, some U.S. allies in Europe might be alarmed at a putative President Trump's warm feelings towards Russia. This doesn't seem to bother the candidate, who doesn't have much sympathy for the Europeans. European leaders, Trump said, are "dealing with Russia, they're taking in the gas, they're taking in the oil. And you know, we're making a big deal out of it."

Trump also believes that Crimea is Europe's problem and that the U.S. has no role to play in the territorial dispute.

In aggregate polling, only Ben Carson presently threatens Trump. Hailing from economically moribund Detroit, the gifted neurosurgeon is no foreign policy expert. In March, he told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt that "we need to convince (the Baltics) to get involved in NATO," seemingly unaware that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were already members. Obviously, the Kremlin would prefer that Carson were right.



On the other hand

While the Republican field is incredibly competitive, Clinton's only realistic rival for the Democratic nomination appears to be Bernie Sanders, the 74-year-old senator from Vermont. A self-styled "democratic socialist," he has been a consistent critic of U.S. foreign policy, and has described the N.S.A. as being "out of control." While that might suggest he is more amenable to Russian interests than Clinton, he has strongly supported Obama's policy of sanctions against Russia.

Of course, current positions are based only on opinion polls. The real voting doesn't start until February, when both Democrats and Republicans will begin their primary season. This time eight years ago, Hillary Clinton was almost 30 percentage points ahead of Barack Obama, according to Gallup, but we all know that Obama later took the Democratic nomination and eventually the presidency. At the same time, former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani enjoyed an average 12-point lead at the top of Republican polls over actor Fred Thompson. Ultimately, John McCain was selected.

If Russia's leaders could vote, they'd probably back Trump for the Republicans and anybody but Clinton on the Democrat ticket. The Kremlin's worst nightmare would be a Clinton-Rubio battle. In such a contest, Russia would make a convenient whipping boy for their foreign policy tussles. Worryingly for Moscow, Clinton-Rubio remains far more likely than Trump or any Democrat alternative to Clinton. Russia could easily find itself used as the electoral bogeyman du jour. It could be a long year.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#41

><http://readrussia.com><

November 11, 2015

A Question of Terminology

By Marina Pustilnik

With the ill-fated flight 9268 from Egypt's Sharm el-Sheikh to St. Petersburg relegated to the back burner of the public conscience, the new hot topic on social media this week was a new performance by Petr Pavlensky, who first gained notoriety in 2012 by sewing up his mouth in protest against Pussy Riot verdict. Since then, Pavlensky has successively performed a show called Carcass during which his assistants brought him naked in wrapped in a multilayered cocoon of barbed wire to St. Petersburg parliament building; Fixation, when he nailed his scrotum to the stone pavement of the Red Square; Freedom, which consisted of building an imitation barricade, burning tires and shouting Maidan slogans (once again, in St. Petersburg); and, finally, Segregation, which had him cut off his earlobe while sitting naked on the roof of the infamous psychiatric Serbsky Center. Difficult as it may be for some to stomach, he is not a raving lunatic: Pavlensky has undergone six psychiatric examinations and ruled sane by all of them.

And now, this week, he stirred up the social media with his performance at Moscow's Lubyanka Square, where he set fire to the doors of the FSB headquarters and remained there until his arrest. The internet predictably exploded. The "liberals" rained a torrent of



praise culminating in granting Pavlensky a status of a genius and a living classic of the modern art. The "conservatives" called for his incarceration and forcible hospitalization to a psychiatric ward. The authorities charged him with "vandalism" and he's been put in detention until early December, awaiting the trial, which can send him to prison for up to three years. Appearing in court on Tuesday Pavlensky demanded that investigators change the charge from vandalism to the much weightier charge of terrorism, arguing that others who had committed similar acts had been judged under that offense. He threatened to remain mute until such change takes place.

Now that we are done with the introduction, here is what I really want to talk about. It all comes down to a question of terminology. A thoughtful reader would have probably noticed that throughout the first two paragraphs I have never called Pavlensky an artist. Why? Because I don't believe that he is one. I am, by no means, alone in this opinion, and I have seen a fair share of discussions centered precisely around this issue. Those who believe Pavlensky to be an artist, albeit a performing one, like to invoke Marina Abramovic, inquiring whether their opponents believe her to be an artist. Those who deny him the right to be called that usually cite their more traditional view of what it means to be an artist.

The big difference between Abramovic and Pavlensky is that all of her performances are, at their core, deeply personal. They are always about Marina Abramovic and her complex interactions with the world around her. Pavlensky's performances, on the other hand, always seek to speak for a crowd (and that crowd is growing). He might be the bravest of the crowd, but his reactions to the Russian regime are by no means unique. The way I see it, every one of Pavlensky's performances is a political protest first and foremost. The artistic statement in each of them is almost an afterthought. Pavlensky is a dissident and a fighter against the regime (one of the commentators called him a kamikaze to Voina art collective's guerrilla-style warfare). The readiness to mutilate oneself to raise the public's awareness of some issue does not a modern artist make. Seriously. And even definitions such as "political art" are suspect, because what is political art if not a form of propaganda? Its aims couldn't be nobler, but propaganda is propaganda, it is different from art.

But what is interesting here is that the fans of Pavlensky are not the only people who see his performances as art. The mighty Russian state itself has judged it to be art by charging the St. Petersburg native with vandalism, not terrorism like he so desires. The Byzantine politics behind that decision (and the outcome of the future trial and the subsequent severity of Pavlensky's sentence) are a much more interesting topic for discussion than the supposed genius of the radical performer, but engaging in such conversations requires knowledge and some analytical abilities - a much rarer currency than the emotional reaction that pretty much anyone can master.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#42

History News Network

><http://historynewsnetwork.org><

November 9, 2015

Review of Anthony Marra's *The Tsar of Love and Techno*

By Walter G. Moss

Walter G. Moss is a professor emeritus of history at Eastern Michigan University and Contributing Editor of HNN. He is the author of *A History of Russia*, Vol. I and Vol. II.



Anthony Marra's new book *The Tsar of Love and Techno* (2015) has already received rave reviews for its literary excellence. Here, however, we'll focus on how well its interrelated nine fictional stories reflect developments in Russia, especially in post-Soviet Russia. (See [here](#) for a broader treatment of the value of fiction in deepening our understanding of history.)

In his "Acknowledgements," Marra mentions eight "works of nonfiction [that] were invaluable while researching the stories of this book." One of these is David King's *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (1997), which especially provided background for his first story, "The Leopard." Set in Leningrad, in 1937, it is the only piece dealing exclusively with the Soviet period. Its narrator, Roman Markin is a "correction artist" who airbrushes Trotsky and others out of old photos. "During one bleak four-month stretch," he tells us, he did nothing but airbrush Stalin's pitted cheeks.

In depicting Markin through his own narration, Marra does a good job portraying the mentality of a communist true believer. Markin says of his nephew Vladimir, "I wanted that little fellow out there on the divan to grow up, to become an active builder of communism, to look back on his life when he is a fat and happy old man, to know that the faultless society surrounding him justifies his father's death."

Later in the story when Markin is arrested, as many were in the late 1930s, he thinks like some other loyal Stalinists did. Urged to confess to the falsehood that he conspired against his country, he thinks, "By refusing, I become the traitor whom I am accused of being. . . . But my allegiance to the party has superseded all other allegiances . . . without it, I don't know who I am; without it, I die a stranger to myself." Historians like Robert Conquest and Simon Sebag Montefiore—a book of each is among the eight acknowledged by Marra—have recognized that such thinking was among the many reasons (including torture) that people, especially Communist Party loyalists, confessed during the late 1930s to crimes they could not possibly have committed.

Marra's penultimate story, "A Temporary Exhibition," is set in St. Petersburg, 2011-2013, and features a showing of Markin's altered works of art. His nephew Vladimir is now an old man and is accompanied to the exhibit by his adult son Sergei. This reappearance of an individual from an earlier story frequently occurs in this collection, and Vladimir and Sergei were also the chief characters in the previous story, "The Palace of the People," which is set in 2001. These two post-Soviet pieces dealing with a father and son reflect some of the realities of Russia's Putin years.

In the 2001 story, Sergei is worried about being conscripted into the army and being sent to fight in Chechnya, where Chechens were continuing a guerilla war even though the Russians had devastated and then captured their capital, Grozny, in the previous year. Sergei states that "deferments went to university students, fathers, and prisoners, only the last of which me and my friends had any hope of becoming in the near future." The prospect of having to serve and maybe die in Chechnya persuades Sergei and his friends to think of crimes they might commit to get themselves sent to prison until the conflict is over.

These young men were typical of many alienated youth in post-Soviet Russia. Sergei states, "We knew nothing of history—decent odds that three of the four of us couldn't tell



you what year Jesus was born. . . . We wanted to become gangsters, but who could we look up to? Where were our heroes? Our fathers drove gypsy [unlicensed] cabs, washed dishes, and pumped gas, their blood so timid a guillotine couldn't make them bleed. They longed for the old days, not because their lives had been better, but because there had been an equality of misery back then. We were their sons and we wanted more."

The nostalgia for Soviet times that Sergei speaks of when there was "an equality of misery," characterizes many older Russians. Back in the Soviet period, dissident historian Andrei Amalrik believed that the desire that "nobody should live better than I do" was the "most destructive aspect of Russian psychology." And the new "crony capitalism" of post-Soviet Russia produced some fabulously rich oligarchs, but left many Russians worse off and more resentful than ever of the nouveau riche, who now flaunted their wealth in ostentatious displays with their new automobiles and other consumer goods.

Sergei's parents had tough lives. Like many Russians, his mother died while still in her working years-she was a cashier who worked in a store where shortages were the norm. His dad (Vladimir) "wore rubber gloves and a surgical mask when he bagged white powder on the kitchen table." For a while Sergei thought he was a doctor, not realizing he was a heroin dealer. When his mother discovered Sergei was his "father's errand boy," she slapped her son and proclaimed, "Criminals, everywhere . . . . On the TV. In the street. In the Kremlin. Now in my home. I won't live with two of them." She called the police, and Vladimir went to prison.

After his dad's release and his mother's death, Sergei and his friends also often use drugs. His dad gets him a job helping a legless veteran (Kirill) who begged in the Petersburg metro system. Sergei observes, "You couldn't go more than three metro stops without seeing a crippled vet from the war in Chechnya. . . . [Some] got drunk and murmured stories so depraved they could never be true."

High death, alcoholism, crime, and drug rates were all major problems in post-Soviet Russia. By 2002, its death rate was higher than any time since WWII. In his 2014 book *Russians: The People Behind the Power*, Gregory Feifer writes, "If alcoholism was a Soviet nightmare, it approaches the level of Armageddon today." As, Sergei's mom said, "Criminals, everywhere." By 2000, one estimate suggested that 9,000 mafia (organized crime groups) existed. Newspapers reported gory killings and daylight gangland shootings.

Kirill's begging on the metro proves so profitable that he tells Sergei, "I'm saving for a dacha" (second home, usually outside city limits). Sergei tells us, "It was hard to take him seriously. Only crooks, oligarchs, and politicians-often the same person-could afford dachas. Men who could walk, who had never gone to Chechnya, whose sons would never go to Chechnya. And here was Kirill, thinking he could be one of them." When Sergei's mom indicates that criminals are also in the Kremlin, she alludes to the widespread political corruption that accompanied organized crime.

In "A Temporary Exhibition," set in 2011-13, Sergei is a decade older and now making a living by sitting in a Petersburg cybercafé and scamming (via the telephone) naïve Americans into providing personal identity information including Social Security numbers. Vladimir is proud of him. "Wasn't this what every parent hopes for? To equip your child with the confidence and support to seize opportunity, to succeed where you failed? His boy, an entrepreneur. He felt a strange surge of patriotism, a gratitude for the vision of his leaders. Here in the New Russia, you weren't bound by the past. The grandson of an enemy of the



people, the son of a convict, his boy, a successful businessman."

Although Marra seldom directly mentions Vladimir Putin, who has dominated twenty-first-century Russia, the few characters who do speak of him generally do so favorably, as do most real-life Russians. In Marra's second story, "Granddaughters," a group of young women are critical of one of their friends, Galina, who "was stupid enough to become a dissenter" and critic of Putin. "Had she educated herself on the situation in Chechnya," they think, "she would have seen that the president [Putin] was correct in his approach, as he is in all things."

"Granddaughters," is set in the fictional town of Kirovsk, 1937-2013. It is one of the three major settings for the book's stories, the other two being Leningrad/St. Petersburg and Chechnya. Kirovsk resembles the actual city of Norilsk, each being inside the Arctic Circle and a polluted, unhealthy center for nickel mining. In the valuable book *Ecocide in the USSR* (1992) we read that "the men of the city [Norilsk] were said to have the highest rate of lung cancer in the world." In Marra's longest story, entitled the same as the book as a whole, the narrator says that "the doctor confirmed what we already knew: 'One in two people in Kirovsk will die of lung cancer.'" In another story the narrator says, "Average male life expectancy in Kirovsk hovers somewhere in the high forties and while elderly men aren't mythical creatures, they aren't quite of this realm."

Kirovsk is also the setting of "Wolf of White Forest." And the story does what most of the others do-links generations together, so we sense the effect historical developments have had on various characters. Vera is now (1999) 63 years old, but as a child in Kirovsk, she had been greatly praised by Soviet authorities for denouncing her mother. But in this last-year of Yeltsin's presidency, Vera complains that inflation is hurting her because her "pension stays the same" and half the time doesn't even get paid. Her friend tells her that "the economic shock treatment has hurt the weakest members of society . . . Not just you. Also the enfeebled and alcoholic." To help herself financially, Vera lets her home be used for drug processing.

One member of the drug gang is Kolya, who is between tours in Chechnya. He describes to Vera "the heroin trade like a market analyst, cloaking the brutal business in the hazy virtues of laissez-faire capitalism." About Kolya, Marra adds, "Schools had only taught him how to cheat; the military had trained him in ballistics, subordination, and intimidation; he had returned to a mining town where the jobs had become automated and the narcotics business was the only prosperous industry that would benefit from his skill set."

Two stories, "The Grozny Tourist Bureau" and "A Prisoner of the Caucasus," occur mainly in Chechnya from 2000 to 2003. (In his 2014 award-winning novel, *A Constellation of Vital Phenomena*, Marra dealt with the same area in the decade between 1994 and 2004.)

In the first story, as in some others, Marra mixes tragedy with comedy. Before it was destroyed by Russian rockets, the Grozny Museum of Regional Art featured a picture that Markin (see above) had altered in the 1930s-this nineteenth-century picture by a Chechen artist also appears in several other of the book's stories, helping bind them together. Blinded in the museum blast was its restoration artist, Nadya, who Ruslan, the museum's former deputy director, now helps. He is also offered a new position trying to attract tourists to "the most devastated city on earth." He works on a brochure trying to put a positive spin on such realities as the Russian occupation of the city-"first-rate security his brochure will trumpet.

In the second Chechen-centered story the "prisoner," before his death in a mined field, is contract-soldier (mercenary) Kolya, who we have met before as part of a Kirovsk drug gang. Before his first Chechen posting he had got Galina (see above) pregnant. She later became a beauty queen and film star before becoming a dissident. She and Oleg Voronov, the rich oligarch she married after Kolya first went to Chechnya, are the most notable nouveau riche people in Marra's stories. Although post-Soviet Russia does indeed contain such people, they are far outnumbered in real life, and in this collection, by all the less fortunates.

Like any historical non-fiction, Marra's fictional stories do not completely describe post-Soviet Russia. The effects of Soviet and post-Soviet history, including Putin's years in power; pollution; political corruption; yawning social and economic inequalities; conflict with the Chechens; high death rates, alcoholism, crime, and high drug rates are only part of the story. But an important one, and Marra tells it well.

[\[return to Contents\]](#)

#### **[Forward email](#)**

This email was sent to celeste\_a\_wallander@nss.eop.gov by [redacted]  
Rapid removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [About our service provider.](#)

P6/b(6)

Johnson's Russia List

[redacted] Chincoteague | VA | 23336