



Putin's Risks

By Leon Aron

Western and Russian observers alike have watched with mounting concern for slightly more than a year as President Vladimir Putin has tried to consolidate the Kremlin's control over Russia's politics and economy. From the campaign against the YUKOS oil company to the elimination of regional elections, Putin—a growing chorus of critics argues—is leading the country toward authoritarianism.

But the Kremlin's authoritarian project—while deplorable in its own right—carries even greater risks than commonly appreciated. Although officially justified as necessary to “strengthen” state and society, these policies in fact are likely to do the very opposite, destabilizing Russia's politics, economy, and national security. In evaluating the current situation, some leading analysts in Moscow privately spoke last fall of a “GKchP-2 scenario,” a reference to the unsuccessful August 1991 hardliner putsch, whose perpetrators sought to prevent the breakup of the Soviet Union but instead brought about its speedy collapse.

The cumulative effect of Putin's re-centralization has been to raise the center of political gravity to the very top at precisely the time when the Russian state will need every available ounce of stability and maneuverability to absorb severe shocks and navigate sharp turns. The regime's course is made even more perilous by its efforts to remove or obscure the road signs of societal feedback, which Russia's increasingly emaciated democratic politics and constrained media are less and less capable of providing.

Increasingly, the government's policies are an explosive mixture of the unpopular and the

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ineffective. Since 2000, public opinion polls have consistently shown that, more than anything, Russians want their government to sustain a steady improvement in the standard of living, maintain law and order, and protect them from terrorism. At the heart of Vladimir Putin's high approval ratings has been his ability to “deliver”—de facto or symbolically, but convincingly—on all three points. Early on he “connected” with the majority of Russians by projecting the image of an energetic and caring advocate for the people's well-being, a determined opponent of corruption, and a tough but competent defender against terrorism. Today, because of its choices, the regime is increasingly vulnerable on all three fronts.

Ineffective Economic Policies

Spurred by the currency devaluation and high oil prices, Russia's remarkable economic growth of the past six years has expanded well beyond the energy sector. Yet the shift in Putin's economic policy toward greater state control or ownership and, with it, the customary incompetence, corruption, and waste, may already be dampening the expansion.¹

According to Putin's senior economic adviser, the radical liberal economist Andrei Illarionov, the “effectiveness” of Russian economic policy has been “declining” because of the “movement toward state intervention” and because, “out of a pool of choices, bureaucrats tend to take decisions that have a higher rate of return for themselves, not for the country (redistributing rent rather than implementing responsible economic policies).”²

As a result of the Kremlin's “utterly incompetent interference,” Russia's economic growth has

failed to keep pace in the past year with the rising price of oil, falling behind by almost 2 percentage points according to Illarionov's calculations.³ Had it not been for high oil prices, he argues, "Russia most likely would have had a recession."⁴

The YUKOS Fallout. The continuing detention and trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former CEO of Russia's largest private company, YUKOS, and the systematically malicious judicial extermination of Russia's most modern, most transparent, and most profitable enterprise have further damaged the country's economic prospects. Regardless of the veracity of the charges against Khodorkovsky, who was arrested in October 2003, the blatant procedural violations and the brazen bending of the court to the Kremlin's will have violated the letter as well as the spirit of the progressive 2001 Criminal Procedural Code.

Illarionov has called the entire YUKOS affair "the swindle of the year" and a "serious mistake" that boosted illiberal forces in the country, with "dire consequences for . . . industry, the authorities, and for the country as a whole."⁵ The prosecution of Khodorkovsky has sent a clear signal to federal and local authorities everywhere that they can blackmail and extort local businesses with impunity. The rigged bankruptcy "auction" at which YUKOS's key production unit, Yuganskneftegaz, was sold to a front company at half its actual value, followed by its quick resale to the state-owned Rosneft oil company, has further eroded the integrity of financial and legal institutions and underscored the vulnerability of corporations to the arbitrariness of executive power.

The predictable consequence of the YUKOS affair has been the chilling of entrepreneurial activity in Russia, with billions of rubles in potential investments transferred for safekeeping abroad. Down to just \$2 billion in 2003, capital flight from Russia is estimated to have reached \$16.9 billion between January and September of 2004.⁶

An uncertain, and worsening, legal regime has resulted in little foreign investment outside the oil and gas sectors. Yet even here, with oil prices near record levels, some of the largest potential players are increasingly unwilling to commit funds. Recently, Lee Raymond, the CEO of Exxon Mobil—which in the fall of 2003 came very close to investing in a 25-percent share of YUKOS–Sibneft (at the time Russia's largest company)—said that it was "pretty difficult for people to think [of] putting large sums of money in [Russia] as an investment."⁷ In the meantime, the Kremlin by all available reports has no idea how to

"end" the YUKOS affair and thus extricate itself, and the country, from the increasingly embarrassing and damaging misjudgment.

Welfare Reform and the 2005 Budget. The perception of Putin's commitment to the bettering of the Russian people's lot has been considerably tarnished by last August's welfare reform, which replaced myriad in-kind entitlements with cash allowances for over 30 million Russians, including the disabled, the elderly, World War II veterans, and survivors of the Nazi blockade of Leningrad and the Chernobyl disaster. Ranging in benefits from subsidized telephone service to free bus rides, dentures, wheelchairs, and prescription drugs, the system was notoriously poorly targeted, wasteful, corrupt, and very much in need of overhaul. Yet the peremptory manner in which the law was passed by the Duma, the size of the cash supplements, and a generic mistrust of the state bureaucracy have combined to make the majority of Russians unhappy or, at the very least, suspicious of the "reform."

Critics argue that replacing "privileges" with a monthly 450-ruble entitlement (about \$14) and supplementary allowances ranging from 600 to 2,400 rubles amounts to a de facto reduction of benefits for vast numbers of recipients. An additional concern is that the new system will not keep up with inflation, which may reach 11 percent this year. To add insult to injury, the passage of the reform was accompanied by massive increases in the salaries for top federal officials.

In the end, Russians felt shortchanged. Almost twice as many told pollsters that they expected their families to be worse off after the reform as felt that they would gain from it.⁸ Only 35 percent of Russians approved of the reform, while 55 percent were opposed.⁹

This shift in the perception of the state's priorities has been compounded by the 2005 state budget. Amidst record surpluses, appropriations for the "social sector" (housing, medical care, education) register miniscule growth—and even a de facto reduction after inflation. This past October, according to trade union officials, more than 1 million state sector workers, including teachers, doctors, and scientists, took part in a strike demanding a 50-percent increase in their salaries, which for the most part are below the national average of 5,000 rubles (\$180) per month.

Public Discontent. The evidence of Russians' growing discontent with their government's economic policies

is so much more arresting because general well-being—which is by far the single most important explanation of Putin’s popularity¹⁰—is still very high by the lights of the past fifteen years. Last November 61 percent of the surveyed reported their material situation to be “middle-of-the-road,” good, or very good, and 72 percent said that they have either adjusted or expect to adjust “in the nearest future” to the epochal changes that have swept Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹¹

Yet despite the relatively good material situation of a majority, over half of Russians report to the pollsters that the government cannot tame inflation, and four in ten feel the Kremlin does not care about the “social protection” of the population.¹² While slightly over one-third agreed that the past year brought changes for the better in Russia, their share was virtually the same as in March 2000, when Putin was first elected to the presidency, while the number who feel that the change has been negative has almost doubled, from 16 percent to 30 percent.¹³

Designed to deflect criticism from the government, the populist propaganda class war on the country’s richest citizens—a campaign that has been a staple of Kremlin public relations for the past fourteen months, centered around the YUKOS affair—does not seem to have gained traction in public opinion. Last November only 33 percent of Russians expressed annoyance toward (18 percent), contempt for (7 percent), or hatred of (8 percent) the people “who became rich in the past 10–15 years,” while 27 percent expressed “respect” (15 percent) or “interest” (12 percent), and the rest reported having “no special feelings” toward them.¹⁴

Bad Governance

The government also seems to be failing in “delivering” on another of its key promises: that of political stability. Last October, only 22 percent of Russians surveyed felt that in the past few years Russia became stable, while 67 percent agreed there was no stability in the country.¹⁵ Most ominously, over half of the population reported the political situation in Russia as “tense,”¹⁶

and 45 percent reported an increase in their “dissatisfaction with the authorities.”¹⁷

As a result, what has been aptly labeled “resigned acceptance of an incomplete democracy”¹⁸ may be shifting in favor of a concerted political action. While in 2000 less than half of the people indicated support for political pluralism, two-thirds did last fall, with the numbers of “don’t knows” dropping from 24 percent to 13 percent.¹⁹ In the words of leading independent political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin, “The feeling that there are no real alternatives to Putin upsets the people. I think the number of citizens who think this way will grow.”²⁰

Toward a Unitary State. Much of the rising political unrest and dissatisfaction in Russia can be traced to Putin’s pursuit of measures that equate control with security and gravely weaken key institutions outside the executive branch—foremost, his September 13, 2004, plan for changes in Russia’s political structure, announced in the aftermath of the Beslan massacre.

Speaking before his cabinet of ministers and the governors of most of Russia’s eighty-nine provinces, Putin put forward a blueprint for what he called “a cardinal restructuring . . . of the executive power in the country . . . with the aim of strengthening the unity of the country.”²¹ Putin went on to propose a number of measures that cumulatively spell a significant recentralization of power by the Kremlin. By far the most ominous features of this plan are the election of the regional governors by local legislatures at the recommendation of the president, rather than in free and competitive popular elections as has been the case since 1992, and the elimination of “single mandate” seats in the Duma, whose representatives will now be strictly chosen from party lists. Putin subsequently signed legislation eliminating the election of governors by popular vote on December 12, while a proposal to end the direct election of individual Duma members is expected to receive swift parliamentary approval this year.²²

The reimposition of direct political control over the provinces has riled local elites. Despite their voicing no public protest and, in some cases, even paying lip service to Putin’s plan, the governors are said to be seething, especially in rich and ethnically non-Russian regions.

For the first time since the late 1990s, there was even talk in Moscow this past fall about groups of provinces uniting into ten to twelve “states” and declaring their “autonomy” or even independence from Moscow.

With provincial elites in passive resistance, Putin’s “reform” lacks popular support as well. In a national poll conducted shortly after the September 13 speech, almost two-thirds of the surveyed thought that the governors should be elected, rather than appointed.²³ Rejecting a key official justification of the reform, six in ten respondents felt that the appointment of governors would either leave the present level of corruption undiminished or even raise it.²⁴ At the same time, 50 percent told pollsters that a Duma deputy would serve their interests better if he or she were elected directly rather than on a party list, while only 9 percent preferred election by party list alone.²⁵

According to persistent rumors among the Moscow cognoscenti, the gap between the Kremlin and the rest of the country will grow wider still. The appointment of governors is said to be followed by a second, as yet unpublicized, phase of federal reform, which envisions a drastic reduction in the number of provinces, their merger into larger entities, and the abolishment of non-Russian ethnic “autonomous republics.” Such steps are all but certain to provoke popular resistance, which in the larger, especially predominantly Muslim areas, has the possibility of becoming violent. One of quite a few horrifying prospects is the potential transformation of 3.7-million-strong, majority-Muslim Tatarstan in the heart of Russia into another Chechnya.

The Abandonment of Structural Reforms. After adopting a slew of revolutionary pro-market reforms from 2000 through 2003—including land privatization; a radical simplification of the tax code and the reduction of personal and corporate income taxes to some of the world’s lowest flat rates; pension privatization; the liberalization of currency laws; and the passage of a package of laws on the breakup of the state electricity monopoly—the Putin administration has slowed its pursuit of structural reforms or abandoned them altogether. Among the desperately needed but unfinished or subverted measures are a radical administrative reform that would free small and medium businesses from bureaucratic blackmail; the compliance

with and enforcement of the 2001 Criminal Procedural Code, including the strengthening of courts’ independence and the protection of the rights of defendants; and stronger guarantees of property rights, especially for acquisitions made during the 1990s.

The glacial pace of Russia’s military reform, which aims to create a much smaller, all-volunteer force, has left intact the widely hated draft. With all manner of medical and educational deferments available to the better educated or the better off, conscription increasingly delivers only the poor and often the physically unfit, rendering parts of Russian defense establishment virtually dysfunctional and utterly unprepared to deal with a large-scale terrorism threat.

Apart from hampering long-term economic growth, the postponement or abandonment of the gradual privatization of state monopolies in the impoverished housing, utilities, and health care sectors is bound to increase social tensions. Of greatest concern is the delay in the privatization of electricity generation plants and the gradual de-control of wholesale and retail prices of electricity. The reform, approved by the Duma a year and a half ago after exhaustive review and debates, was designed to attract badly needed private capital to the worn-out and archaic industry. In the absence of investment and renovation, another severe winter is almost certain to bring more blackouts and fatalities.

With the governors appointed rather than elected, however, henceforth the Kremlin, and not the local authorities, will be the lightning rod for any popular indignation and demonstrations caused by natural and man-made disasters—from floods and pollution to industrial accidents and lack of heat and electricity in winter—that are bound to continue to occur.

The Failure to Reduce Corruption. President Putin’s image as a competent and energetic defender against rapacious bureaucrats has also been undermined by the regime’s inability to reduce, let alone eliminate, corruption. The openly voiced consensus judges official venality today to be beyond anything seen in either the Soviet Union or post-Soviet Russia thus far.

At the outset of Vladimir Putin’s presidency in 2000, pollsters asked Russians whether they expected that there would be more or less thievery and corruption

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after his election. At the time, 36 percent believed that malfeasance would diminish, while 46 percent thought it would remain at approximately the same level.²⁶ When the question was again put to the Russian people following Putin's reelection four years later, the share of optimists was down to 29 percent, while those who predicted no change climbed to 58 percent.²⁷

In 2000, a 47-percent plurality of Russians named corruption as the main obstacle to the implementation of "democratic and market reforms"; the next most frequently cited factor was the lack of a "thought-through" program, mentioned by 42 percent.²⁸ In 2004, after four years of Putin, concern about corruption has not diminished in a statistically significant way—it is still cited by 42 percent of respondents—but its relative prominence has increased as the absence of a coherent reform program, still in second place, is now cited by only 30 percent.²⁹

While it is true that most Russians are accustomed to ubiquitous graft and venality and have stomachached them for a long time, no one should bet on their tolerating corruption indefinitely, especially after they begin to identify it as a barrier to their country's vital political and economic progress. In this context the example of neighboring Ukraine is portentous: in a country by all accounts even more corrupt than Russia, popular revulsion over official wrongdoing became one of the key driving forces behind last year's popular protest against the perpetuation of the ruling regime. In Russia, too, acquiescence may give way to a mass movement for change.

The Impact of Terrorism

Whatever damage is done to Vladimir Putin's popularity by his recent political and economic choices, the regime's inability to end the festering Chechen crisis—and the future terrorist attacks facilitated by it—represents an even greater threat to Russia's stability.

The Russian people first rallied around Putin in October 1999 following the invasion of Dagestan by fundamentalist Chechen warlords seeking to establish "an Islamic Republic of Northern Caucasus." At the time, Putin—recently appointed prime minister and projecting competence, energy, and determination—promised to go

to the source of the attacks and end them once and for all. Today, by contrast, in the bloody wake of the 2002 Nord-Ost theater attack and the September 1, 2004, Beslan massacre, the number of Russians who express no faith in the government's ability to shield them from terrorism has grown by half—from 50 percent to 76 percent.³⁰

Following the storm of media criticism about the Kremlin's handling of the siege in Beslan—with the incompetence, corruption, and callousness of the authorities receiving unprecedented coverage—that heinous attack produced surprisingly little by way of "rallying around the flag." While 18 percent of Russians reported that they felt better about Putin in the aftermath of Beslan, 21 percent said their attitude toward the president had somewhat or significantly worsened.³¹ Another large-scale terrorist attack is almost certain to produce a sharp drop in, if not indeed a meltdown of, Putin's approval ratings.

The damage will be greater still if Shamil Basaev, Chechnya's principal al Qaeda-linked warlord and the reputed mastermind of the Beslan massacre, succeeds not merely in perpetrating further suicide bombings or conventional attacks against Russian civilians, but in a large-scale massacre that kills thousands or tens of thousands—sabotaging, for instance, a hydroelectric power station, dam, or chemical or nuclear facility, or detonating one of thousands of nuclear weapons that remain scattered around the country.

The intensity of popular indignation and revulsion after such an attack would be so much stronger because of a disjuncture between Russian public opinion on the Chechen crisis and the government's policy. Contrary to the Kremlin's widely disseminated claims, more people traced the Beslan tragedy to the war in Chechnya (39 percent) than either to international terrorism (27 percent) or "enemies in the West" (12 percent).³²

In sharp dissonance with the official policy of "no negotiations," a consistent majority of Russians (54 percent to 59 percent) has for the past three years favored the avoidance of civil casualties "at any cost," including acquiescing to terrorists' demands.³³ Even more importantly, 55 percent indicated in a poll last September that for the war in Chechnya to end, "some sort" of negotiations with the

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insurgents would have to be started, compared to 32 percent who thought the continuation of military operations offered the best prospects for peace.³⁴

All in all, as many people in a poll last October blamed the “mistaken policies of the Russian authorities” for the spate of terrorist attacks (35 percent) as did “plots by hostile forces” (34 percent), with the remainder attributing equal responsibility to both factors.³⁵

Yet not only does the Kremlin stubbornly refuse to take notice of the popular mood, it has aggressively attempted to use Beslan to end the debate on Chechnya and impugn the motives of those who favor a different course. In an interview that was widely interpreted as defining the Kremlin’s policy, the deputy head of the presidential administration, Vladislav Surkov, averred that Chechen terrorists are “servicing political technologies” of Russia’s unnamed enemies, who he claimed had sought for two centuries to “blow up Russia’s southern borders.” Surkov went on to say that he sensed “the smell of treason” in the mere suggestion of alternatives to the Kremlin’s current approach and labeled their advocates “a fifth column.”³⁶

As further terrorist attacks occur, the majority of Russians who today favor negotiations and insist on avoiding casualties at any cost may become galvanized into protesting nationwide. Their demands may include not only the immediate abandonment of Chechnya to the insurgents (as Russia did in 1996) but also the shedding of the entire North Caucasus, south of the Stavropol region, with perhaps a wall along the new border. Demoralized by yet another loss, with the president’s popularity sharply down and protests threatening to become violent, the authorities may retreat in panic.

Such a hasty withdrawal would be an unmitigated disaster. Chechnya is almost certain to fall to jihadist warlords and become a fundamentalist Muslim enclave and a haven for world Islamic terrorism, like Afghanistan under the Taliban. The abandonment of the North Caucasus, which is home to over a dozen ethnic groups, risks an explosion of Yugoslavia-like proportions.

Ready for a Dictatorship?

Taken together, Vladimir Putin’s economic, political, and security policies are beginning to damage his popular image, which until a year ago seemed coated in Teflon.³⁷ The

number of Russians who see more failures than achievements during Putin’s stay in office has grown to one-fifth of the electorate, while the percentage of those who consider the president to be serving the interests of people like themselves has slipped to 44 percent.³⁸

Between March 2003 and October 2004, the number of those who thought Putin knew the mood of the society has diminished from 66 percent to 53 percent, while the share of those who were convinced he did not know grew from one-quarter to over one-third.³⁹ Although a solid majority still approves of Putin’s performance, the margin had fallen 20 percent between December 2003 and

September 2004, from 84 percent to 66 percent.⁴⁰

More ominously, more Russians think the country is on the wrong track than the right one: 51 percent to 38 percent respectively.⁴¹ The dynamic of these attitudes is just as telling. A year ago, in January 2004, the numbers were almost exactly reversed: 37 percent and 50 percent.⁴²

Of course, as crises mount and the president’s popularity falls, the Kremlin may try to discard its milder version of plebiscitarian authoritarianism (that is, the one held together largely by the leader’s political dominance based on immense popularity) in favor of a classic dictatorship based on systemic coercion and violence. But even if President Putin wished to establish such a regime (which today still is very much of an open question), would he be able to?

Lacking the Instruments. The Kremlin lacks virtually all the key instruments of successful modern authoritarianism. It has no mass party or, at least, mass movement. The pro-government United Russia party is widely perceived as mostly a collection of opportunists who will jump ship the moment the going gets tough. United Russia also lacks a clearly and consistently articulated unifying ideology.⁴³

The loyalty of the armed forces—another sine qua non of a sustainable dictatorship—is very much in question. The strong apolitical tradition of the Russian military, so evident in its reluctance to intervene in the political conflicts of August 1991 and September–October 1993, argues strongly against the likelihood of its decisive support for the regime, especially if violence becomes necessary.

At same time, the Kremlin’s inability, or reluctance, to effect military reform has prevented the creation of a

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competent, modern force that could have become a major stabilizing factor in a crisis. Instead, deeply demoralized by the continuing Chechnya debacle and corroded by corruption and brutal hazing, the military is likely incapable of mustering the coherence and esprit de corps necessary to become a key power player on anyone's side.

That leaves the secret services as the putative dictatorship's most likely enforcer and guardian. In the past few years, President Putin has placed many of his former colleagues throughout the executive branch, making the KGB/FSB the single most common institutional affiliation among the top government officials. Yet in addition to the less-than-certain ability of the secret services to secure and hold power without the support of the armed forces, their reliability in a major crisis is far from ensured.

Until recently considered the least corrupt of all Russian institutions, the FSB and other "power" agencies appear by all private accounts today to be catching up in rapaciousness to their widely despised policeman colleagues in the Interior Ministry. In fact, in the opinion of some of Russia's leading political observers, much in the Kremlin's new economic policy—especially in its dispatch of President Putin's top aides to the boards of directors of some of Russia's most lucrative companies⁴⁴—may be little more than a massive go at the trough after the "lean years" of the 1990s, when the leaders of the secret services seethed at the sight of private entrepreneurs ("appointed billionaires," in Putin's famous phrasing) growing rich.⁴⁵

If so, those whose loyalty has been rewarded once and who thus acquired a taste for high living may in the future be swayed by higher bidders. The "vertical of power," which the Kremlin has spent so much time and effort engineering and advertising, may yet prove to be corroded to the core.

The Legacy of the Revolution. Yet perhaps the greatest obstacle against a classic dictatorship in Russia is the legacy of the revolution of 1991. With over 70 percent of the economy in the non-state sector, the restoration of a Soviet-style dictatorship is extremely unlikely.

Although fear of the state is a force to reckon with in Putin's Russia, it is not going to take hold easily after almost twenty years of freedom of speech and protest. In newspapers and magazines (and occasionally still on television), opinion leaders on the Right and on the Left attack the regime with abandon and ferocity. Every leading publication and most opposition parties, movements, groups, and even individuals have websites, while Internet

penetration is estimated to be at least 15 percent of the population and is growing by leaps and bounds.⁴⁶

The levels of literacy, urbanization, and education—the factors that traditionally militate against the establishment and survival of dictatorships—are all very high for a country with Russia's per-capita GDP. The cultural autarchy of the Soviet Union has followed the command economy into the trash heap of history, and Russian elites are very cosmopolitan. By every poll, those under thirty years of age are virtually united in their support of democracy and private property. Like their peers everywhere, they are largely apolitical yet have mobilized impressively to defend their vital interests in the past, as in the August 1991 and the 1996 presidential elections.

The Strains of the Familiar. A totalitarian regime, like the one that ruled Russia until the late 1980s, owns and manages everything. When it collapses, much of what constitutes a modern state—its institutions, economy, and society—collapses with it, leaving behind enormous fissures and piles of post-revolutionary rubble. Vladimir Putin was elected because he personified to most Russians the hope of using state power and resources to clear the field for rank-and-file citizens, while nurturing the new institutions of private property, democracy, and the post-Soviet legal system.

In the first three years of his presidency, Putin appeared to be living up to the expectations of the Russian people and, helped by a rapidly expanding economy and high oil prices, was rewarded with astronomic ratings. But beginning with the Kremlin's assault on the YUKOS oil company in 2003, he seemed increasingly unable to choose between the two competing halves of his identity: that of the former KGB lieutenant colonel, and that of the former top aide to the late Anatoly Sobchak, Russia's leading anti-Communist and mayor of St. Petersburg.

The trauma of Beslan must have made the familiar and the traditional all the more irresistible to Putin. Consequently the Kremlin now appears to be inclined to make the state the most powerful player in Russian politics, to repossess at least some of the economy's commanding heights, and turn an evolving federation into a rigid unitary state. Yet with all the key elements of modern authoritarianism swept away or eroded by the 1991 revolution, these tasks may prove far more arduous and, in the end, dangerous than the Kremlin imagines. Having set out to strengthen the Russian state at any cost, Putin instead may risk its destabilization and even unraveling.

Notes

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32. Levada Center, "Kak pokonchit' s terrorizmom v Rossii" (How to Finish Off Terrorism in Russia), September 16, 2004, www.levada.ru/press/2004091602.html (accessed November 11, 2004).
33. Ibid.
34. *Moscow News*, September 22–28, 2004. The polling is by the Levada Center.

35. Levada Center, "How to Finish Off Terrorism in Russia."

36. "Vladislav Surkov: Putin ukreplyaet gosudarstvo, a ne sebya" (Putin Strengthens the State, but Not Himself), *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, September 29, 2004.

37. ROMIR Monitoring, "Grazhdane Rossii o prezidente" (Citizens of Russia on the President), September 16–21, 2004, www.romir.ru/socpolit/socio/09_2004/president1.htm (accessed December 7, 2004). Of those surveyed, 21 percent trusted President Putin "fully," and 52 percent "trusted him more than they mistrusted him"; 25 percent mistrusted Putin fully or "completely." In November 2004, Putin was admired (4 percent) and liked (30 percent), as well as someone about whom "nothing bad could be said" (69 percent). (Levada Center, "Sociopolitical Situation in November 2004.")

38. Foundation for Public Opinion, "Putin as President."

39. Ibid.

40. Tatiana Skorobogatko, "The People Support Putin, but Reject His Policy," *Moscow News*, September 22, 2004; and Levada Center, "Uroven' odobreniya deyatelnosti V. Putina na postu prezidenta Rossii" (The Level of Support for V. Putin in the Post of President), www.levada.ru/prezident.html (accessed January 7, 2005).

41. Levada Center, "Sociopolitical Situation in November 2004."

42. Alexander Kolesnichenko, "The Despair Syndrome," WPS Monitoring Agency, December 6, 2004, www.wps.ru (accessed December 3, 2004). The numbers cited are from a Levada Center survey.

43. For more on the current regime, see Leon Aron, "The Putin Restoration," *Russian Outlook*, Spring 2004, www.aei.org/publication20360.

44. Putin aide Viktor Ivanov is chairman of the boards of directors of a strategically valuable defense company, Almaz-Antey, and of the Russian airline Aeroflot. Deputy chief of the Kremlin administration Igor Sechin is chairman of the board of the state-owned oil company Rosneft, which recently acquired Yuganskneftegaz, the main production unit of YUKOS. Putin's chief of staff, Dmitry Medvedev, is chairman of the board of the state-owned energy giant Gazprom. Deputy chief of the Kremlin administration Vladislav Surkov is chairman of the board of the state-owned oil pipeline monopoly Transnefteprodukt.

45. See, for example, Leonid Radzikhovskiy, "Osedlye chekisty" (The Settled Chekists), *Ezhenedel'nyi zhurnal*, September 27–October 3, 2004, 23.

46. Foundation for Public Opinion (FOM), "Oprosy 'Internet v Rossii,' Leto 2004" (Surveys "Internet in Russia,") Summer 2004, www.fom.ru (accessed November 14, 2004).