

Putin and Shoigu: Reversing Russia's Decline

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With his March 2000 presidential victory, Vladimir Putin is ready to put his mark on Russian politics after Boris Yeltsin's chaotic regime.¹ Earlier, 60 percent turnout in the 19 December 1999 elections voted for a Duma that, with Communist Party support, will likely agree to continue the war in the northern Caucasus indefinitely. Putin's political party, Yedinstvo, also known as "Unity" or "The Bear," won votes based on the idea of subverting Chechnya, erasing crime and terrorism from the Russian Federation, and reversing any notion that Russia is "a failing state." The new Duma may likely support an anticriminal, antiterrorist platform following the March 2000 presidential election. Clearly, discipline and order are the new tenets of Russian society as the country enters the twenty-first century. An emerging Russian ideal of statehood carries broad implications for stability, security, and emergence of democracy in the Russian Federation.

The Rise of Putin and Shoigu

In March 1999, Putin was appointed secretary of the Russian Security Council while he also headed the domestic intelligence service, or FSB. In the Security Council, Putin coordinated policy between the Ministries of Defense and the Interior, the FSB, foreign intelligence, and others. Putin headed the FSB through the Kosovo conflict and in the period before the Chechen incursion into Dagestan. Then Russian president Boris Yeltsin gave Putin and the FSB the task of "safeguarding" the Duma and presidential elections—a mission interpreted by analysts to mean ensuring the election of Yeltsin allies. On 9 August, Yeltsin sacked Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin for failure to stop the Dagestani events, appointed Putin to the post, and declared him heir apparent to the presidency, an unprecedented move in post-Soviet Russia.

One month later, in September 1999, the Kremlin nominated Sergei Shoigu,

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minister of Civil Defense, Emergency Situations, and Natural Disasters, and a close ally of the acting president, to lead Yedinstvo in the 1999–2000 elections. Shoigu's qualifications for national office include his youth, his handling of economic and political disasters at home, important foreign policy missions to Yugoslavia, Libya, and Cuba, and his sending his troops to Germany and the United States for disaster and emergency training. Moreover, Shoigu supervises civil defense assets, including seventy thousand men and their equipment that were stripped from the Ministry of Defense in the early 1990s. Shoigu's national prominence has escalated with Chechnya, which has demonstrated his allegiance to Putin's policy in the Caucasus and his ability to steer clear of serious corruption allegations under the Yeltsin regime. In February 2000, Shoigu's ministry was responsible for restoring energy, gas and water supplies, sewage systems, outpatient clinics, hospitals, and schools in northern Chechnya, which provided him with more national visibility. He also supports Yedinstvo's creation of a "young bears" movement, similar to the old Soviet *Komsomol*, and the organization's slogan, "Those who don't want to work will be made to work."²

Most important, however, is Shoigu's support for the Russian armed forces and state stability. He asserted that "to criticize the actions of federal troops in Chechnya means to betray the interests of the country and the Russian army."³ What Shoigu is doing is following Putin's lead in rallying the Russian populace against Chechen intransigence and, ultimately, state collapse. Shoigu has been rewarded for his allegiance to Putin by being appointed deputy prime minister, while still retaining the power and far-reaching assets of the Emergencies Ministry. Specifically, Putin rewarded Shoigu by giving him responsibility for coordinating the State Committee on Far North Affairs, the Federal Migration Service, the Federal Service of Railway Troops, the Russian Agency for State Reserves, and the Federal Mines and Industrial Supervision Agency.⁴ Indeed, Shoigu is gathering valuable political strength to coordinate people and raw materials.

With Shoigu's help, Putin supports the legacy of former KGB chief and CPSU first general secretary Yuri Andropov as a *silovik*, not a Communist. As early as 15 April 1999, before the current northern Caucasian war, Putin stated that public opinion polls showed that Andropov was one of the most respected former Soviet Russian leaders, and he spoke positively about the former general secretary's emphasis on discipline. Andropov attempted to improve discipline in the workplace and crack down on corruption in Soviet society. In post-Soviet Russia, the notion of Andropovian discipline is being applied to the election process and the war in the northern Caucasus. In June 1999, Putin, speaking to regional FSB chiefs, stated that "the necessity for discipline and order is ripe in society" for the Duma and presidential elections.⁵ By the time he was appointed prime minister, Putin had created a popular image of himself as a no-nonsense enforcer who vowed to "rub out" the Chechen rebels. In December 1999, Putin also discussed the need "to have a strong hand, but not the way it was in 1937," by cracking down on crime, collecting taxes, and creating effective civil and state institutions with strong authority.⁶

Assisting Putin in the Andropovian rebirth are many officials from the FSB. For instance, the new chairman of the Russian Security Council, Lieutenant Gen-

eral Sergei Ivanov, served in the old KGB First Department in the late 1970s; he has been responsible for forecasting and strategic analysis in the FSB as a deputy chairman since 1998. Ivanov is now becoming a key player in drafting memoranda on Russia's emerging security concept. In addition, seventeen key figures in the Kremlin, including two deputy prime ministers and the head and deputy head of the FSB, rose through the ranks of the St. Petersburg regional government when Putin was the city's deputy mayor in the early 1990s. Many have FSB backgrounds, including Viktor Cherkesov, first deputy director of the FSB; Nikolai Patrushev, FSB director; Vladimir Kozhin, chief of the president's business management department and now head of the Russian Federal Service of Currency and Export Control; Viktor Ivanov, a deputy chief of the Kremlin staff; Yuri Zaoostrovsky, a deputy to the FSB director and chief of the FSB economic security department; Nikolai Bobrovsky, a deputy to the chief of the prime minister's secretariat; Sergei Golov, deputy head of the foreign relations section of the president's business management department; Valery Golubev, chief of the St. Petersburg mayor's department of tourism; and Sergei Chemezov, head of Promexport. These officials seem to understand the need for law and order while pursuing market reforms. Also, most of them are in their forties and are providing Russia with a new, younger generation of post-Soviet leaders. How ironic it is for the West after battling the KGB throughout the cold war that the FSB is Russia's hope for rescuing the state from total collapse.

A campaign supportive of the intelligence organizations and Andropov seems to be under way. On 29 July 1999, Putin, as FSB head, noted the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Alfa antiterrorist group formed by Andropov. Putin warned that "terrorists and extremists of every stripe must know that Russia has people who reliably safeguard constitutional principles."⁷ In December 1999, during the height of the Duma elections, Putin praised the KGB successor organs on the eighty-second anniversary of the Russian security services. Putin stated, "Several years ago we fell prey to an illusion that we have no enemies. We have paid dearly for this. Russia has its own national interests and we have to defend them."⁸ For the then-prime minister, "The organs of state security have always guarded Russia's national interests; they should not be separated from the state and turned into a monster."⁹ Both statements have Chechnya and the Russian Federation in mind. Putin made sure to assert that Russia's priority was to fight "international terrorism" in the northern Caucasus.

As for rescuing the Russian economic situation, Putin has assembled the Center for Strategic Research to help him formulate reform efforts. Economist German Gref—brought to the Kremlin by Anatoli Chubais, the architect of Russia's early privatizations and head of United Energy Systems, and Rem Vyakhirev, chief executive of Gazprom, the gas monopoly—is putting together Putin's plan. Gref, who is in his mid-thirties, rose to become a deputy privatization minister when Putin took on the acting presidency. According to Gref, Russia will pursue the market; but he has hinted at maintaining a paternalistic state, along the lines of Germany or Sweden, a theme repeated constantly by Putin and Shoigu.

A New Russian Ideal

In late 1999, some Russian sources started to compare Putin with U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt to illustrate the need for positive, strong changes in Russian society: "In 1932, Roosevelt gave the U.S. population a positive psychological charge, formulated short-term and long-term goals for the country, and created a business-like mood, and the Great Depression began to be overcome."¹⁰ In late December 1999, Putin was being called "the next Jefferson" by delegates to the postelection Yedinstvo conference, who saw the acting president as a "founding father" of a new post-Soviet Russian state.¹¹

As a "Roosevelt" or a "Jefferson," Putin, just days before Yeltsin's resignation, published what may be the most significant document by a Russian leader since the December 1991 Brest and Alma-Ata Accords that destroyed the Soviet Union. The fourteen-page document, "Russia on the Threshold of a New Millenium," provides an ideological rationale for the Russian Federation. Putin announced that the Russian people want a "paternalistic" state and that he intends to build for them a strong government that will invest in the national economy, subsidize exporters, and stamp out corruption: "Society wants the restoration of a guiding and regulatory role of the state to the extent dictated by national traditions and the state of the country."¹²

Putin analyzed Russia's decline since the collapse of the Soviet Union. He laid much of the blame for the nation's descent into poverty and disorder on the Soviet Communist Party. But he was also critical of Yeltsin's "radical" reforms that had attempted to "transplant to Russian soil abstract models and schemes derived from foreign textbooks." Putin called for the creation of a new national ideal. The section on "the Russian ideal" was the most detailed. Putin stressed patriotism by using the rather archaic and imperial term *derzhavnost*, or belief in the state's greatness. Putin pledged to build such a state by launching a rational restructuring of government departments, by turning the civil service into a "meritocracy" that would advance the best "specialists," by increasing "discipline" in government, and by declaring war on corruption.¹³ In other words, Putin is telling the bloated Russian civil service—mostly former GOSSNAB and GOSPLAN employees—that a major housecleaning may occur.

Under *gosudarstvenichesvto*, or statism, Putin wrote:

Russia will not soon become, if it ever becomes, a second copy of, say, the U.S. or England, where liberal values have deep historical traditions. Among us the state, its institutions and structures, have always played an exclusively important role in the life of the country and the people. A strong state is for Russians not an anomaly, not something that must be fought against, but on the contrary is the source and guarantor of order, the initiator and main driving force of all change.

In his statements about social solidarity, the then-prime minister argued that individualism is far less important for Russians than communal ties. "The collective form of lifestyle has always dominated over individualism," he wrote—adding that this communalism expresses itself in a national desire for a paternalistic regime.¹⁴

Finally, Putin turned to the economy, where he offered a vague mix of the "guiding hand" economic policies pushed by former prime minister Yevgeny Primakov

in 1999 and Gref in early 2000. He encouraged investment from both domestic actors and foreign corporations. "We call for pursuing an investment policy that would combine pure market mechanisms with measures of state guidance." Tax and budgetary reform will be pursued, he wrote, as will the restructuring of the banking sector and elimination of barter and other noncash forms of payment. Putin is also eager to better integrate Russia into the world economy, arguing that membership in the World Trade Organization will be a priority. Putin wrote that he also wants to ensure active state support for exporters and said that a Russian government agency should be created to provide guarantees for export contracts. He pledged to "resolutely combat the discrimination against Russia on the world mar-

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kets of commodities, services and investments, and to approve and apply a national anti-dumping legislation"—a notable reference to U.S. anti-dumping cases.¹⁵

While Putin seeks greater political and economic reforms through markets and state regulation, Shoigu seeks to establish a party of power to serve Putin's new ideal. Shoigu—

whether rightly or wrongly—has used American history to make his point about the new Russian ideal. In December 1999, Shoigu wrote that when Thomas Jefferson defeated John Adams in 1800, it marked the first of many peaceful, legal transfers of power between political adversaries in the history of the United States. In February 2000, Shoigu called for Putin to head Yedinstvo so that the president will be identified with a major political party.¹⁶

An examination of Shoigu's writing on Putin's national ideals reveals very similar aspirations for a strong state mechanism to accelerate economic growth. On 26 December 1999, Shoigu argued for overhauling the cumbersome Russian tax code in ways that would lower rates, combat illegal evasion, and eliminate loopholes that are unfair to ordinary citizens; for protecting the legal rights of both domestic and foreign investors, who require reasonable regulations that are fairly enforced; for providing material incentives for job-creating investment; for greatly simplifying procedures relating to production sharing as a means to attract more foreign investment; and for ending the unnecessary ban on the sale of agricultural land.¹⁷ Changes along these lines are critical to improving Russia's business environment and its standing as a trading partner. In the State Duma, Shoigu's Yedinstvo may be able to push for these reforms, especially if the Communist Party is left out of any anti-corruption or antiterrorism probes and can contribute its support.

Conclusion

By praising the Russian security services and embracing the memory of Yuri Andropov, Putin and Shoigu signal future trends for the Russian Federation. They

are also making the Chechens an example of how Russia intends to deal with criminal elements in the future. Chechens are obvious targets due to their strong presence in the economic community of the Russian Federation and abroad, as well as their constant struggling against Russian political, economic, and cultural hegemony. Often they resort to crime to advance their interests in politics and commerce. Chechen criminals specialize in arms trade, car theft, contract murders, extortion, narcotics, petroleum and natural gas diversions, and visa fraud, with key nodes in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Frequent travel and links with Chechens abroad allow them access to funds and technology. Clearly, the Russians seek to neutralize Chechen economic links that are perceived as criminal. Also, Russia is targeting the estimated forty thousand militants who preach radical Islam (called by Russian authorities "Wahhabism") in Chechnya. These rebels do not accept Western or Russian models of political, economic, or social development. They also attack the incorporation of Russian customs and innovations as corrupting influences on Chechen culture. Since the Moscow bombings of September 1999, which the Kremlin blames on Chechen terrorists, Operation Whirlwind in Moscow and Operation Storm Anti-Terror in North Ossetia have sought to isolate Chechens who may or may not have any links with the rebels. Some estimates suggest that over thirty thousand Chechens have been detained and ten thousand Chechens deported from Moscow alone.¹⁸

More important, the Chechen campaign has rallied Russian citizens and provided, for the first time, a post-Soviet ideological rationale for the Russian state that is based more on nationalism than nascent democracy. A number of cleavages that had split Russian nationalists are now erased: for instance, debates over whether market economics and authoritarianism can coexist; whether territory lost during the Soviet implosion can be retained, or whether it is acceptable to have a small (but not a collapsing) Russia; whether foreign political and economic policy should promote isolationism or expansionism; and whether the Russian Orthodox church supports the state.

The rise of Putin and Shoigu in early 2000 reflects the political and economic rejuvenation of the Russian state after the August 1998 ruble collapse. Domestic industry is expanding at the expense of imports; in fact, economic growth in 1999 outpaced the previous two years combined. Russians are feeling proud again. While achieving power through constitutional means, Putin and Shoigu, as emerging nationalists, exploit dissatisfaction with the economy and the instability of the state in Russia. In many ways, the Chechen war adds to a national self-image of a country that operates by force, not negotiation. Even the Russian Orthodox Church, the most popular Russian institution, according to recent opinion polls, supports the nationalist bent of the Chechen war. Patriarch Alexii II stated, "When they [the Chechens] say civilians have been killed in Chechnya, you have to think of the Russian people who died in Moscow, Volgodonsk and other Russian cities and the hostages including Orthodox priests."¹⁹

It is important to point out that this form of Russian nationalism may stop at the borders of the Russian Federation. Putin's formula for stopping the disintegration of Russia seems mostly sincere, not manipulative, but intentions can

change and grow as domestic and foreign policies evolve. To the extent that a Chechen "loss" is viewed as a victory over terrorism, it would be a continuation of that victory for Russia to press onward in the Caucasus against the intrusions of terrorists or, perhaps, Western and NATO influence in Georgia and Azerbaijan.

In terms of the Russian armed forces, there is an unprecedented close relationship between Putin and the military, especially the chief of the Russian General Staff, Anatoly Kvashnin. The interests of the state and the military are nearly identical, and civilian oversight of the Russian military has declined. In the next few years, troops and commanders now involved in the Chechen war will form the core personnel of the Russian military's revival under Putin's leadership. The revival has already begun. On 31 December 1999, after signing a decree banning prosecution against Yeltsin, Putin signed the decree "Readiness of Russian Citizens for Military Service," which revives the Soviet-era practice of providing two to three hours a week of military training in schools.²⁰ Boys will be expected, among other things, to learn to take apart and reassemble rifles, and girls will learn first aid and other medical techniques. In February 2000, Putin signed "On the Directorates of the Federal Security Service in Armed Forces, Other Troops, Troop Formation and Organs," which would reinstitute the Soviet-era practice of placing "political commissars" inside Russian military units to counter the activities of foreign intelligence organizations, root out criminal activities in the armed forces, including the theft of weapons, and achieve "elimination of negative phenomena within the army environment."²¹ Putin's revamped "national security concept," released in January 2000, is a nod to the military's concern over NATO expansion and the Kosovo war. The document appears to broaden the circumstances in which Russia might resort to nuclear weapons; it rejects the idea of a strategic partnership with the United States and takes a geopolitical world view that postulates growing tension between a hegemonistic America and its European allies and Russia, China, India, and other emerging nations.²²

What do Putin and Shoigu mean for Russian foreign policy? The key question is whether Russia will support Westernism or Eurasianism by joining the Euro-Atlantic world or will raise up a multipolar balance of power (i.e., an anti-Western coalition) against it? Perhaps they are somewhere in-between, similar to former Balkan envoy Viktor Chernomyrdin, who during the 1999 Kosovo war was open to being influenced by both foreign and domestic audiences, and who ended up Eurasian in form but Western in substance. Putin and Shoigu will be harder to shape or influence through engagement and benefits from cooperation. However, they will probably be open to both Westernist and Eurasianist possibilities and to seeing which is workable in practice.

Overall, Putin and Shoigu are untainted by past Soviet or Yeltsin governments and their lack of vision. Much like Andropov, Putin and Shoigu do not blame the Russian system, but seek to make the Russian people more responsible for political and economic performance. Whether their program is a manipulation by oligarchs is subject to speculation. The Kremlin's popular war in Chechnya is seen as a battle between right and wrong, good and evil, and this helps to mobilize support for anticrime and antiterrorist policies. Putin and Shoigu are working

together to bring in strong authorities and compensate for the weakness of the Russian state. Clearly, the rising Russian elites seek to diminish the struggle between the executive and legislative branches, reverse the Kremlin's unpredictable policies, and stifle allegations of corruption and *kompromat* in order to stabilize the Russian Federation. We again have to ask ourselves, some ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with the rise of Putin and Shoigu: Will Russia become a democratic state?

NOTES

1. Part of the article is drawn from Theodore Karasik, "Putin's Chechen War and the Rebirth of Yuri Andropov," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 5 January 2000. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/Jan%205/Putin%20and%20Andropov.htm>.

2. Ibid. The group may also be called *Soyuzmol*.

3. See Sergei Shoigu, "New Ideology For the Defense Complex," *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozheniye*, 17–23 December 1999, 1.

4. "Putin Details Duties of Vice Premier Shoigu," ITAR-TASS, 13 January 2000. <http://www.itar-tass.com>.

5. Karasik, "Putin's Chechen War."

6. "Putin Answers Questions on Chechnya," *RTN*, 4 December 1999, World News Net Database (FBIS), FTS199991204000946.

7. Maksim Isayev, "Alfa Celebrated Anniversary: Antiterror Fighters Congratulated by Entire Political Leadership," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 31 July 1999, 2.

8. Karasik, "Putin's Chechen War."

9. Ibid.

10. Vladimir Kuznechevskii, "What Are You Barking About, Boyars? Who Is the Target of the Press' Noisy Criticism: The Prime Minister or Russia's National Interests? Why Does Public Opinion Not Support These Vociferous Anti-Government Attacks?" *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 12 November 1999, 5.

11. Svetlana Ofitova, "Putin II: Vladimir Vladimirovich—President of Russia Under Boris Nikolayevich," *Segodnya*, 29 December 1999, 3.

12. Vladimir Putin, "Russia at the Turn of the Millenium," 27 December 1999. <http://www.pravitelstvo.gov.ru>.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. "Shoigu Favors Putin Unity Chairmanship," *Interfax*, 7 February 2000, World News Net Database (FBIS), CEP20000207000042.

17. "Shoigu Outlines Guidelines of Unity's Draft Program," ITAR-TASS, 27 February 2000, World News Net Database (FBIS), CEP20000227000052.

18. Karasik, "Putin's Chechen War."

19. Ibid.

20. Guy Chazan, "Putin to Start Military Training for Schoolboys," *London Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 2000, 1.

21. Will Englund, "Putin Revives Security Checks of Army," *The Oregonian*, 16 February 2000, 3.

22. "Russian National Security Concept," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 14 January 2000, 1–2.