

# Muddling Through the Shadow of the Past(s)

## Post-Communist Russia's Search for a New Regime Ideology

CHENG CHEN

**Abstract:** For many scholars, the current Russian regime is characterized by pragmatism aimed at, first and foremost, the maintenance of political power. But as the country's international status rises and domestic problems persist, the regime is clearly interested in defining a new regime ideology beyond nationalism that can justify regime rule and guide longterm developmental strategy. This article seeks to examine the major forces shaping the current Russian regime's search for a new ideology. It explores the reasons why this process has been so difficult and full of ambiguities, looking at both key historical and institutional factors that constrain the regime's ideological repertoire and at vital strategic choices made by regime leaders and political elites. It argues that the current Russian regime's inability to form a clear new ideology largely stems from two major sources: the fundamental incoherence of the regime's ideological repertoire and the relative weakness of Russian political elite's commitment. Consequently, the regime has had to "muddle through" a rather inconsistent assortment of selected elements from the past(s), only to arrive at vague concepts devoid of any concrete socioeconomic programs—such as "sovereign democracy"—to define itself. This kind of fundamental ambiguity could have far-reaching implications, both domestically and internationally.

**Keywords:** elite politics, ideology, regime legitimacy, Russian politics

Ever since the Soviet Union collapsed almost two decades ago, two distinctive post-Communist eras have emerged in Russia, for both Russians and outside observers alike. While most of the Boris Yeltsin era was marked by chronic political chaos and sharp economic decline, the period since 2000 seems to be characterized by relative political

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Cheng Chen is an associate professor of political science at University at Albany, SUNY. Her research and teaching interests include post-Communist politics, nationalism and nation-building, democratization, Chinese politics, and comparative-historical methodology. She is the author of *The Prospects for Liberal Nationalism in Post-Leninist States* (Penn State University Press, 2007) as well as many journal articles. Currently, she is working on a new book project examining the search for regime ideology in post-Communist China and Russia. Copyright © 2010 World Affairs Institute

stability and, at least until recently, robust economic growth buoyed by petro-dollars and a cheap currency. At the same time, if there was still hope during the Yeltsin presidency that the country might eventually move toward a more liberal and democratic direction, such hope was largely dashed as the Vladimir Putin regime's authoritarianism appeared to stabilize.<sup>1</sup> For many scholars, the past decade in Russia has been characterized by pragmatism aimed at, first and foremost, the maintenance of political power in domestic affairs and the projection of Russian state power in international affairs.<sup>2</sup> This pragmatic approach presumably not only forms a contrast with the Soviet regime's official ideological commitment to "building socialism,"<sup>3</sup> but is also different from the Yeltsin era's pursuit of radical economic liberalization in the face of severe socioeconomic consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the regime's firm grip on power, Russian citizens remain largely dissatisfied with their institutions,<sup>5</sup> and the dominant political party, United Russia, fails to inspire political confidence among the public with any clear guiding ideas.<sup>6</sup> As the country's international status rises and domestic problems persist, some key elements within the regime have been seeking a system of ideas to define and promote a distinctive identity that can be viable in the long run. According to the Kremlin's chief ideologist, Vladislav Surkov, "a bureaucratic way of keeping the country together cannot last, and we will be unable to maintain the country's integrity without complementing this vertical power with an 'ideology' recognized by the people."<sup>7</sup> Thus far, the most concerted effort by the regime in this respect has been the promotion of so-called "sovereign democracy." This, however, is still a long way from becoming a full-blown ideology that can justify regime rule and frame longterm developmental strategy.

The importance of ideology in shaping the country's post-Communist political and socioeconomic development has been noted and explored in a number of excellent scholarly works in recent years.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing the independent and intervening effects of ideologies, many of these works treat them as largely given, something to be adopted or rejected by political actors that in combination with other factors could lead to far-reaching political and economic consequences. The formation of new ideologies in the post-Communist setting, nevertheless, remains a rarely studied area of inquiry. This article will examine the major forces shaping the current Russian regime's search for a new ideology, and will explore the reasons why this process has been so difficult and full of ambiguities. It will observe both the key historical and institutional factors that constrain the regime's ideological repertoire and the vital strategic choices made by regime leaders. Moreover, it will seek to offer a tentative assessment of the potential implications of this ongoing regime ideology-building process. The first section will discuss the context and the initial steps in terms of building a new ideology under the current Russian regime. The following section will focus on how historical and institutional legacies from the past contributed to a rather incoherent ideological repertoire for post-Communist Russia. Then, the article will offer a partial explanation for post-Communist Russian political elites' rather weak commitment to any clear ideology-building projects, and will explore how this affects the regime's search for a new ideology. Finally, the concluding section will summarize these findings and offer some preliminary discussion on the implications of this ideology-building process.

### **Regime Ideology in Post-Communist Russia**

For the purpose of this paper, "regime ideology" is defined in a broad and normatively neutral way,<sup>9</sup> referring to any coherent and consistent system of ideas and discourses

advanced officially by state elites to define and promote a regime identity and mission that transcends individual leaders, parties, and political generations. Whereas a national ideology provides a state with a shared identity and defines citizenship, a regime ideology justifies a regime's longterm domestic and international goals with an emphasis on specific institutional configurations and dominant political and socioeconomic ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, not all political regimes have ideologies, and political regimes can certainly survive for a time without any discernible ideological projects. Indeed, the absence of a regime ideology could even offer a kind of temporary advantage, as it gives the regime much flexibility in policymaking and allows the regime to appeal to diverse political forces. Over time, however, the lack of a clear identity and sense of mission will pose serious problems when it comes to leadership succession and longterm regime legitimacy, as the regime is left vulnerable to external and internal challenges to its *raison-d'état*. Simply put, a regime ideology provides answers to two vital questions any political regime will eventually face: What are the fundamental characteristics of the regime, and what is the regime's longterm mission? If these questions are left unaddressed, it can be difficult for a regime to justify its rule, beyond individual leaders, as a continuing political entity with recognizable and enduring institutional features. Even though successive individual leaders might interpret and apply aspects of regime ideology differently, the ideology must have a set of core values that are commonly accepted within the regime, providing a shared ideational framework for political action. Formulating such an ideology could, therefore, greatly enhance the regime's internal cohesion and longterm durability.

Just like political regimes, regime ideologies can fail miserably. In the case of the Soviet Union, the decline of its official regime ideology—Marxism-Leninism—preceded and expedited the end of the political regime, which simultaneously signaled its ideology's ultimate failure. During the immediate aftermath of this double demise, the Yeltsin regime seemed eager to embrace Western-style democracy and free-market capitalism. The pursuit of the latter, ironically, ended up undermining the former in the Russian case—the heavy-handed tactics by the “market Bolsheviks” significantly enfeebled nascent Russian democracy,<sup>11</sup> and eventually culminated in a system of increasingly authoritarian “super-presidentialism” that derailed the democratization process.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the radical economic liberalization program, while enriching a tiny elite, coincided with plunging living standards of the majority and contributed to the financial meltdown of 1998.<sup>13</sup>

Even though the Yeltsin era can hardly be called a success when it comes to providing the Russian people with political stability and economic prosperity, the regime did succeed in quickly dismantling formal Communist political and economic institutions in a nonviolent fashion, and prevented Communist opposition forces from retaking power. This mixed record, however, had significant implications in the ideational realm. First of all, an ideological vacuum appeared at the regime level. The Yeltsin regime had attempted to make a clean break with the Soviet past, effectively rendering any Soviet symbols, values, or identities unusable in the construction of a new self-image, despite the fact that many of these ideational legacies still retained considerable public appeal.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the regime's liberal project turned into a self-mockery as its visions of political and economic westernization failed to materialize. Consequently, toward the end of the Yeltsin era, the Russian regime was in an ideological limbo—the old had been discarded, but the new did not work.

Secondly, Western-style liberalism was largely discredited as a viable future regime ideology due to the Yeltsin era's policy failures. Whether or not there was actually a causal

link, for most Russians the regime's liberalization programs came to be fatefully associated with a rapidly declining economy, ballooning crime and corruption, and the breakdown of law and order. Finally, as the Yeltsin era progressed, ordinary Russian citizens became extremely alienated from the regime, and the ideational gap between the general public and the regime widened exponentially.<sup>15</sup> Any successor regime would have to deal with and repair at least some of the damages that the Yeltsin era had inflicted in terms of alienating the Russian masses.

Such were the daunting challenges that confronted the Putin presidency in its pursuit of a new ideology. By many measures, compared to the Yeltsin era, the Putin presidency was a success, at least from the regime's point of view. Economically, the Russian economy recovered robustly after the 1998 meltdown, mostly due to a rapidly devalued ruble and rising oil prices.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the past decade and until recently, the country enjoyed a respectable and sustained annual growth rate of around 6–7 percent. Politically, the Putin presidency successfully consolidated power by systematically weakening and suppressing opposition forces and strengthening the central government's authority. Even at the personal level, Putin's calculated image of being a strong, resolute leader contrasted sharply with Yeltsin's often erratic style, contributing to a consistently high popularity rating.<sup>17</sup>

These apparent successes, however, did not denote a high level of regime legitimacy. Indeed, low or even declining levels of public confidence or trust in most national government institutions suggested that the popular support for the regime still very much hinged upon the regime's ability to deliver desired public goods such as public order, economic security and social justice—all of which were linked to a stronger sense of national pride.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Putin's authoritarianism came under increasing international criticism even as the country's international status continued to recover. In this context, despite Putin's previous claim that he was "against the restoration of an official state ideology in any form,"<sup>19</sup> the regime had taken some initial steps to build a new ideology that could justify regime rule and even provide a longterm basis for domestic and international legitimacy. The promotion of so-called "sovereign democracy" was such a step in this direction.

To be sure, the contemporary Russian political system had been associated with other labels derived from many different political and scholarly perspectives—such as "guided democracy," introduced by pro-Kremlin theorists such as Gleb Pavlovsky;<sup>20</sup> or "managed democracy," widely used among Western observers.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the exact wording and the terms' respective origins, the core idea of these labels is the same: "Democracy" under the Putin regime was not a Western-style liberal democracy at all, but a tightly controlled entity overseen by the regime itself. According to Grigory Yavlinsky, the head of the liberal Yabloko party in Russia, "managed democracy" included government control of the mass media, elections in which candidates suddenly withdrew or were disqualified, politically influenced judicial decisions, and the transfer of power from the regions to the Kremlin.<sup>22</sup> In other words, this political system's emphasis was on "guided" and "managed," rather than on "democracy." Employing the term "managed pluralism," Harley Balzer describes the Putin regime as integrating "insistence on a nation's unique path," which required strong executive authority, with "ambiguous responses to the diversity accompanying globalization."<sup>23</sup> But unlike many other "competitive authoritarian regimes" or "illiberal democracies"<sup>24</sup> that either do not focus upon ideology or rely upon preexisting religious or cultural commitments to justify their rule, the Kremlin came up with the notion of

“sovereign democracy” as a part of a regime ideology-building project in order to justify such a political arrangement.

The term “sovereign democracy” was first used by Vladislav Surkov in a 2006 speech titled “Sovereignty as a political equivalent of competitiveness,” delivered to activists of United Russia.<sup>25</sup> Surkov suggested that “sovereign democracy” was a political system that suited Russia’s national character, and that Russia should reject “external management.”<sup>26</sup> What this practically meant was that the Putin regime’s authoritarian characteristics were entirely justified by Russia’s national character and that the West had no right to judge or criticize Russia’s political system. In addition, hoping to capitalize on popular resentment over the privatization of the 1990s, Surkov called for the nationalization of the business elite and the marginalization of the so-called “offshore aristocracy”<sup>27</sup>—those who had moved their money and their families abroad. Even though many were unimpressed by its lack of originality, “sovereign democracy” was subsequently incorporated into United Russia’s program statement, and a logo announcing that “United Russia is the party of Sovereign democracy” appeared on the homepage of the party’s website.<sup>28</sup> A number of volumes were also released to discuss and promote the idea in Russia.<sup>29</sup> Meeting Putin’s demand for history classes that would make schoolchildren “proud of their motherland,” a widely publicized history teachers’ manual, which contained an entire final chapter on “sovereign democracy,” was published in 2007.<sup>30</sup>

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Its elevation to a near-official status notwithstanding,<sup>31</sup> “sovereign democracy” remained fundamentally vacuous. Other than emphasizing the importance of a strong state and asserting that Russia should reject all outside—and, in particular, Western—interventions, the concept offered no substantive grand vision as to where Russia should be heading, or what kind of longterm developmental strategy it should pursue. Moreover, it is not at all clear what made the “democracy” in “sovereign democracy” still democratic. To an extent, this ambiguity could be seen as offering a certain advantage in terms of providing the regime with a flexible ideological framework; too much flexibility, however, revealed a troubling lack of consensus among political elites when it came to many crucial political and economic issues. Even President Dmitry Medvedev seemed reluctant to embrace “sovereign democracy.” In more than one interview<sup>32</sup> before his 2008 election as the Russian president, Medvedev reiterated his preference to speak about democracy without any adjectives. Although these statements could be interpreted as part of Medvedev’s pre-election tactics to establish his liberal credential and undermine Surkov’s political influence,<sup>33</sup> the fact that Putin’s official successor stopped short of endorsing “sovereign democracy” showed that the idea had yet to gain significant traction among many Russian political elites.

In sum, the promotion of “sovereign democracy” was certainly an important step away from the ideological vacuum at the end of the Yeltsin era and toward the

construction of a new regime ideology. While liberal democratic regime ideologies had started to take root in many post-Communist Central and Eastern European countries, “sovereign democracy” provided a sort of broad guideline for the regime to identify itself against Western-style liberal democracy. However, this was still far removed from a full-fledged regime ideology that justifies political and economic institutions and presents concrete longterm visions. Given the regime’s authoritarian character and its extensive control over the domestic media, it has considerable capability to inculcate ideas among both the elite and the masses. Against such a background, the regime’s inability to come up with a coherent and substantive ideology was rather striking. In order to understand this outcome and assess the future prospect for regime ideology-building in Russia, the next two sections will look deeper into the process in which the regime searches for a new ideology and will examine the two necessary but not sufficient conditions for successful regime ideology-building—the coherence of ideological repertoire, and the strength of elite commitment—in the contemporary Russian context.

### Ideological Repertoire and the Russian Past(s)

Any political regime attempting to define a new ideology has a range of available ideational elements—an ideological “repertoire”—to draw upon. If this attempt to build a consistent and enduring ideology is to be successful, a relatively coherent ideological repertoire is necessary. An ideological repertoire is relatively coherent if its major elements, as diverse as they may be, can potentially reinforce, instead of fundamentally undermine, one another. However, for any given regime, the existing ideological repertoire is always limited, constrained by historical and institutional factors. As Yury Afanasyev, a Russian liberal historian, states in *Novaya Gazeta*, “The attitude toward the past is the central element of any ideology.”<sup>34</sup> Being either “for” or “against” any preexisting legacies and institutions cannot but shape the available ideological repertoire. In the case of the current Russian regime, the “past” that must be confronted is threefold—it is composed of the pre-Soviet era, the Soviet era, and the Yeltsin era. To further complicate the matter, among these three distinctive pasts, the second radically diverged from the first, and the third attempted to make a complete break with the second. Given the ultimate failures of these previous attempts to reject the preceding era, the Putin regime embarked on its search for a new regime ideology without trying to completely renounce any of these pasts. As will be shown below, however, the regime’s attempts to broaden its ideological repertoire temporarily increased its popular appeal at the expense of its overall ideological coherence.

#### The Pre-Soviet Era

Traditional Russian nationalism, or at least elements of it, had never fully disappeared from the successive Russian regimes’ ideational projects, even under the revolutionary Communist regimes of Lenin and Stalin. To be sure, with Marxism-Leninism as the dominant ideology, the Soviet regime had originally intended to construct a class-based, rather than nation-based, identity, assuming a global mission of promoting the world Socialist revolution and a worldwide Communist society.<sup>35</sup> Russian culture was subjected to intense ideological and political censorship, and many of the core symbols of traditional Russian nationalism—such as the Orthodox Church, the gentry, and the monarchy—were either severely suppressed or completely eliminated.<sup>36</sup> However, the Soviet regime, starting particularly during the Stalinist era, decided that Marxism-Leninism alone was not

enough for the regime to achieve effective ideological control in the context of managing a multinational state with external and internal boundaries. Consequently, the Soviet regime manipulated and integrated selective elements of traditional Russian nationalism, such as the Russian language and part of the Russian culture, into the dominant Marxist-Leninist ideological framework in an effort to hone a Soviet national consciousness.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, despite the fact the Soviet attacks on, and suppression of, pre-Soviet ideational heritage was nothing short of devastating, a certain degree of continuity was preserved even at the regime level.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the post-Communist Russian regime was desperate to form a new ideology. While rushing to replace Soviet symbols and institutions such as the Soviet flag, national anthem, and city names, Yeltsin rehabilitated many key elements of traditional Russian nationalism, such as the tricolor, the national coat-of-arms and, significantly, the conservative Russian Orthodox Church, making it a powerful ally of the regime.<sup>38</sup> Religious holidays were reintroduced, and many properties previously nationalized during the Soviet era were returned to the Church. Furthermore, despite its official commitment to liberalism, the Yeltsin regime took measures to restrict activities of foreign religions and grant special privileges to the Orthodox Church. Throughout the Yeltsin era, the Russian Orthodox Church grew increasingly powerful and its social standing rose substantially.<sup>39</sup> These tactics were clearly aimed at emphasizing aspects of continuity between the Yeltsin regime and the pre-Soviet era. However, much of this was done while rejecting the entire Soviet era as a historical aberration whose legacies were to be completely erased. This turned out to be unacceptable for much of the Russian masses and elite.<sup>40</sup>

Like the Yeltsin regime, the current Russian regime also makes attempts to capitalize on the pre-Soviet era in building a regime ideology, though with somewhat different emphasis.<sup>41</sup> Compared to the Yeltsin regime, it appeals to traditional Russian nationalism in an even more explicit way. During a speech on the eve of his elevation to the post of acting president in 1999, Putin emphasized the importance of “patriotism” and the “belief in the greatness of Russia” in forming a new “Russia idea,” which would be “an alloy or an organic unification of universal general humanitarian values with traditional Russia values which have stood the test of the times, including the test of the turbulent 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>42</sup> In the first state-of-the-nation address following his election, Putin declared that “the only choice for Russia is to be a strong country, strong and sure of itself,” and asserted that “the unity of Russia is strengthened by the patriotic nature of our people, by our cultural traditions, memories.”<sup>43</sup> In 2005, a new holiday, National Unity Day, was introduced by the Kremlin<sup>44</sup> to commemorate the 1612 uprising in Moscow to liberate the Kremlin from Polish occupiers, marking the beginning of the rise of the centralized Russian state. In a highly symbolic gesture by the regime, this new holiday replaced another national holiday, November 7, formerly marked as the day of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. In a 2010 interview with Russian national daily *Izvestia*, Medvedev again emphasized that without going against universal values, Russian democracy should correspond to “Russian traditions.”<sup>45</sup>

Even though the constitution explicitly prohibits having a state religion, the Orthodox Church has been granted a spiritual monopoly in the armed forces, and classes in Orthodox Christianity have been made mandatory in many regions of the country.<sup>46</sup> On various occasions, Putin openly praised the Church’s special role in the “uniting of the Russian world”

and its important contribution to “the national and spiritual identity of Russians,” while pledging continuing comprehensive state support for the Church.<sup>47</sup> Following the enthronement of Patriarch Kirill I in early 2009, Medvedev was shown on Russian television calling the Orthodox Church the historical and future source of “the moral forces of the Russian nation,” while emphasizing the Church’s “enormous contribution to the formation of Russian statehood, to the development of the national culture and to the assertion of spiritual and moral values in society.”<sup>48</sup> In April 2009, Medvedev named Ivan Demidov, a committed nationalist with close ties to Patriarch Kirill and Russian nationalist youth groups, as his liaison to religious communities.<sup>49</sup> In return for the regime’s favors, the Church

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has remained politically loyal to the Kremlin and has supported the official view that Russia’s unique historic role makes it unsuited for Western-style liberal democracy.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, although the top regime leaders largely refrain from open appeals to Russian or Slavic ethnicity, their promotion of powerful symbols of traditional Russian nationalism reveals the regime’s determination to build up its historical legitimacy among the ethnic Russian majority in the country<sup>51</sup>—even as these measures tend to encourage intolerance and

enhance exclusionary ethnic nationalism in a multiethnic setting.<sup>52</sup>

### The Soviet Era

The Yeltsin regime’s attitude toward the 74-year-long Soviet era was wholly negative, despite the fact that it was the only Russian past within living collective memory. Eager to establish its pro-Western liberal credentials and discredit the Communist opposition forces, the regime devalued everything Soviet and all those who had contributed to it, while at the same time mystifying a “West” that was understood in terms of everything opposed to the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, the Yeltsin regime failed to live up to its desired image, and the blanket rejection of values and norms associated with the Soviet order did not lead to the blossoming of a liberal culture thought to be thwarted by Communism. This presented a grave challenge for the succeeding Putin regime’s construction of a new regime ideology.

Realizing that many Soviet ideational legacies still remained meaningful to a large number of Russian people, the Putin regime moved swiftly to partially reconcile with the Soviet past. One of its first steps, and a highly symbolic one, was to restore the popular Soviet anthem, albeit with new lyrics. In explaining this move, Putin made the regime’s position clear: “If we accept the fact that in no way could we use the symbols of the previous epochs including the Soviet one, then we must admit that our mothers and fathers lived useless and senseless lives, that they lived their lives in vain. I can’t accept it either with my mind or my heart.”<sup>54</sup> Along with the anthem, the Soviet Red Army’s red star was also restored as a symbol of the Russian Army.<sup>55</sup> The regime went on to announce a US \$6 million “patriotism education” program to reshape the educational system with

new textbooks, influence the mass media, and create a network of Soviet-style “military-patriotic” youth clubs around the country.<sup>56</sup> In his 2005 state-of-the-nation address, Putin deplored the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20th century, while claiming that “our place on the modern world will be defined only by how successful and strong we are.”<sup>57</sup> Echoing Putin’s view, the Kremlin ideologist Surkov accused those “who consider the non-violent collapse of the Soviet Union [to be] their success” of trying to “annihilate Russia’s statehood.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the regime returned basic military training and patriotism classes to public schools and strengthened the role of the former KGB in the government and armed forces in order to stress the restoration of a strong state as the key to Russian renaissance.<sup>59</sup>

According to a VTsIOM survey in 2008, 60 percent of Russians believed that the Great Patriotic War was the biggest event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup> The Putin regime certainly wanted to capitalize on Russian people’s genuine sense of pride in the Soviet wartime victory to boost its popularity. At a 2006 conference for history teachers, Putin claimed that “Russian history did contain some problematic pages. But so did other states’ histories … We can’t allow anyone to impose a sense of guilt on us.” Such ambivalent attitude is clearly reflected on the regime’s treatment of the Soviet Union’s wartime leader, Josef Stalin.<sup>61</sup> The history textbook recommended by Putin at this conference portrayed Stalin’s dictatorship as a necessary evil in response to a Cold War initiated by the US.<sup>62</sup> Putin had publicly acknowledged that Stalin was a dictator and that the Stalin regime had some “negative sides,” but he also promoted the image of Stalin as an effective leader responsible for the defeat of the Nazis. He stated that “The problem is that it was under his leadership that this country won World War II … It would be stupid to ignore that.”<sup>63</sup> Under the current regime, the recent anniversaries of Victory Day were prominently and lavishly celebrated. In 2008, the regime restored the Soviet-era Red Square military parade not only to mark the victory, but also to demonstrate its military might and signal to the world Russia’s return as a major military power.<sup>64</sup> This move was approved by more than 70 percent of Russians, according to VTsIOM.<sup>65</sup> During his address on the 2009 parade, Medvedev affirmed that the lessons of the war were “relevant today, given the outsiders who are interested in embarking on military adventures.”<sup>66</sup> To further protect the regime’s official version of Soviet history, in May 2009 Medvedev ordered the creation of a commission, headed by his chief of staff Sergei Naryshkin, to act against what the Kremlin terms falsification of Soviet history before, during and after World War II.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, in order to foster relationships with the West and the post-Communist Eastern European states, as well as to lend credence to its proclaimed commitment to “modernization,” the regime, especially since 2008, has come to acknowledge and condemn some of the worst Soviet mistakes, including the police corruption, prison torture, and crimes such as the Katyn Massacre.<sup>68</sup>

To be sure, some Soviet symbols and traditions were revived by the regime not because of their connection to Communism, but as symbols of stability, continuity and power.<sup>69</sup> After all, the Soviet Union under Josef Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev had been a great power, respected or at least feared around the world. According to a 2008 survey by the Levada Center, despite the Stalin regime’s atrocities, 39 percent of Russians still believed that Stalin played an unconditionally positive role in the history of the country, even though this number had declined from five years ago.<sup>70</sup> A late 2009 poll by the Levada Center shows that 60 percent of Russians still regretted the breakup of the former Soviet Union and thought that it could have been avoided, and this rate has only experienced a minor

decline over the past two years.<sup>71</sup> Many Russians who had lived under Soviet rule could easily equate “Soviet” with “Russian.”<sup>72</sup> The disintegration of the Soviet Union, for many ethnic Russians, meant the loss of territory, population, resources, and most importantly, national pride. During the Yeltsin era, this sense of loss and humiliation was further compounded not only by developments and events such as the economic meltdown, NATO’s eastward expansion, and the bombing of Serbia, but also by the liberal elite’s negative depiction of Russia’s historical distinctiveness.<sup>73</sup> Right before Putin’s second electoral victory, most Russians expressed hope that the winner of the election would “reestablish Russia’s superpower status.”<sup>74</sup> According to a late 2008 poll, the majority of Russians (82 percent) expected Russia to join the ranks of the world’s ten leading countries in the next 15–20 years, with 37 percent (compared to 34 percent in 2003) saying Russia should “regain the superpower status the USSR had.”<sup>75</sup>

Putin and Medvedev have publicly and strongly condemned Communism on multiple occasions, and are certainly not Communists. The regime’s restorations of selective Soviet traditions and icons are not attempts to resurrect the Soviet era, but represent a way to connect Russia’s past and present to the majority of Russians who previously felt marginalized by Yeltsin’s “failed nightmare of Americanization.”<sup>76</sup> The restored symbols and traditions are linked less with specific Communist characteristics of the Soviet era, but more with the overall image of the Soviet Union as a strong state that maintained domestic order and stability and a great world power that wielded considerable influence in the region and beyond. This is the very image that the current Russian regime has tried hard to emulate and incorporate into its present post-Soviet identity.

### The Yeltsin Era

Among Russia’s three “pasts,” the Yeltsin era is the briefest and the most recent. In many ways, the strong statism of the Putin regime was a reaction to the instability and confusion generated by the ill-implemented radical liberalization program of the Yeltsin era. In the eyes of most Russians, Yeltsin’s presidency was crisis-ridden compared to the relative stability of the Putin era.<sup>77</sup> Leading politicians and the mass-media in contemporary Russia frequently label the 1990s as a time of “national humiliation,” “a failed state,” and, most of all, “chaos.”<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the Putin regime’s selective restoration of Soviet ideational legacies and its studied ambivalence toward the Soviet era form a striking contrast with the Yeltsin regime’s position of total rejection and unequivocal condemnation. Finally, the Yeltsin regime’s enthusiastic embrace of the Western value system was replaced by the Putin regime’s skepticism and insistence on Russia’s right to follow a more distinctive developmental path.

The current Russian regime, however, is far from a complete break from the Yeltsin era. After all, Putin was hand-picked by Yeltsin as his successor to take over the presidency.<sup>79</sup> The Putin regime inherited the Yeltsin era’s constitution and basic political and economic institutions. Ideologically, the Putin regime also preserved important elements from the Yeltsin era. While rejecting Western-style liberal democracy, which was an ideal publicly championed by Yeltsin, the current Russian regime nevertheless accepted the Western emphasis on international economic standards and the “universal values” of private property and entrepreneurship drawn from the West.<sup>80</sup> Putin himself insisted at the turn of the millennium that Russia’s role in the world had to be based on its economic capabilities, not just on its military might and territorial expansion.<sup>81</sup> In his 2002

state-of-the-nation address, Putin called for closer integration among former Soviet republics for the purpose of “securing... competitive advantage on the world market.”<sup>82</sup> For all its rhetoric on Russian exceptionalism, the regime is clearly eager to reap economic benefits from the international economy; at an international economic forum in 2005, Putin emphasized that “ensuring a high economic growth rate” remained the priority, and that it would be “impossible without integrating the country with global economy,” even though it “should be done on the precondition that this state’s sovereignty is preserved inviolable.”<sup>83</sup> Significantly, Putin picked his loyal protégé Dmitry Medvedev, a liberal economic reformer and someone with no background in the realm of the security forces, to be his successor, a choice that clearly appealed to Westernizers in Russia. Its continuing political authoritarianism notwithstanding, the present Russian regime remains largely committed to market economy and further global economic integration, at least to the extent that such commitments do not undermine the regime’s grip on power domestically and internationally.<sup>84</sup>

According to a recent poll, the great majority of Russians (83.8 percent) listed Russia’s history as their greatest source of pride in their country.<sup>85</sup> However, Russian history, just like any other history, is full of inconsistencies and contradictions. To build a new regime ideology, the current Russian regime has tried to broaden its ideological repertoire by attempting to reconcile with all its three historical pasts that are, as aforementioned, very different from one another: the pre-Soviet era, the Soviet era, and the post-Soviet Yeltsin era. This strategy achieved partial success in that the regime has been able to appeal to the nationalistic inclinations of many Russians and provide them with more of a sense of continuity compared to the Yeltsin era. This partial success is reflected in the persistent personal popularity of Putin, who, as Yuri Levada aptly puts, “is a mirror in which everyone, Communist or democrat, sees what he wants to see and expects.”<sup>86</sup> However, this was done at the expense of the coherence of the regime’s ideological repertoire, which is made painfully clear by the very vacuity of the concept of “sovereign democracy.” The three “pasts” that the regime tries to capitalize on do not share much in common ideationally except a general sense of Russia being an independent great power—and that formed the basis for “sovereign democracy.” The other major ideational elements in the regime’s repertoire, such as conservative ethnic nationalism (which is ethnically-oriented), authoritarian statism (which is state-oriented), and globalizing market liberalism (which is Western-oriented), can certainly coexist, but fall short of constituting a coherent longterm vision that can give the regime a clear and meaningful identity. The regime’s attempt to reconcile Russia’s antagonisms, although making it acceptable to divergent political forces, simultaneously dooms the regime to paradoxical stances.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, the regime’s pragmatic eclecticism produced a convenient, but no more than temporary, ideological expedient.

### **Elite Commitment and Regime Ideology-Building**

Building a regime ideology is a longterm collective project. In order to successfully build a viable ideology, relatively strong commitment among political elites is necessary. Relatively strong elite commitment means that the majority of political elites, defined as the social minority who wield political power and influence policymaking, are able to work with the top leadership toward common ideological objectives that go beyond immediate personal interests and can be sustained over time. Given that political elites are in general self-interested actors, it is nevertheless possible for them to engage in

projects initiated by the leadership that they believe would benefit them in the long run, even if such projects don't yield immediate short-term personal profits. Without strong commitment from political elites, a regime's ideology-building project cannot be sustainable, let alone eventually gain broader domestic and even international acceptance. Currently, most political elites in Russia seem to be supportive of the regime, and the opposition forces remain marginalized. But does this mean that the Russian political elites are committed to the regime's ideology-building project? To answer this important question, this section examines the ideational fragmentation and the personalization of elite politics since the Yeltsin era, and assesses the level of commitment of these political elites at present and in the future.

### **The Ideational Fragmentation of Russian Political Elites**

In the confusion immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many political elites within the Yeltsin regime were initially united by anti-Communism and ready to embrace Western values in their struggle to define a new identity for Russia. However, the regime's liberalization project was intensely contested, even among the political elites themselves—primarily because this project's implied second-class international status for Russia did not correspond to their great-power aspirations and because of the authoritarian manner in which the administration implemented often-destabilizing reforms.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, throughout the 1990s, politics under the Yeltsin regime became progressively unstable and unpredictable. The 1993 dissolution of the Duma, in particular, clearly demonstrated the highly contingent nature of politics under Yeltsin.<sup>89</sup> By creating a system of “superpresidentialism” that concentrated excessive decisionmaking power in the executive, the regime was able to force through some policy initiatives by bending the existing rules of the game and sometimes bypassing the non-liberal parliament.<sup>90</sup> The direct consequence was that, in the absence of a relatively predictable future, and given the economic opportunities created by poorly-regulated privatization and marketization, the majority of the political elites under the Yeltsin era felt increasingly impotent politically; instead, they focused solely on their personal power and enrichment, as evidenced by extensive corruption at all levels of the government.<sup>91</sup> Toward the end of Yeltsin era, political apathy and cynicism had become the dominant trends among elites, and the initial enthusiasm and determination of the “market Bolsheviks” had dissipated. Official corruption was deeply entrenched and rampant, and a small band of well-connected “oligarchs” whose wealth and resources far surpassed that of even the highest-ranked members of the Soviet official class were completely detached from the deeply disillusioned masses.<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, though Yeltsin was not uninterested in formulating a new official regime ideology,<sup>93</sup> such a political context provided little incentive for the political elites to commit to any longterm ideological design. After all, if the elites, and even the regime itself, face a highly uncertain future, the rational strategy would be to focus on immediate, short-term goals, such as money and personal power.<sup>94</sup> What is more, after the failure of the regime's liberalization program, the regime was incapable of coming up with an alternative political project that could command the support of the majority of political elites. Consequently, when Putin came to power, he found himself inheriting a group of fragmented and largely self-serving political elites, many of whom actually turned out to be quite flexible and “pragmatic” in terms of cooperating with the regime despite their apparent ideological reputations.<sup>95</sup>

As a kind of “normalizing” reaction to the Yeltsin era’s rapid and destabilizing transition,<sup>96</sup> the Putin era quickly injected a greater sense of confidence and continuity into the country’s political elites, who now increasingly gravitated toward “the party of power”—Unity and later United Russia—and its cooperative partners.<sup>97</sup> Compared to the Yeltsin era, the Putin era appeared much more stable and predictable with a strong and popular president and a recovering economy, even though the regime’s fundamental institutional weaknesses remained. The regime also made a number of moves to rein in political elites and consolidate state power, including passing a series of new laws to establish a so-called “dictatorship of the law”; implementing new administrative mechanisms to bring regional governors under tighter central control; and curtailing the collective influence of the oligarchs. These measures were effective to the extent that most Russian political elites, including many “liberals,” seemed supportive of the regime, and those who did not had been sidelined. This political outcome, however, was more an indication of the Russian political elites’ cynical “pragmatism”—the calculation that they would benefit politically and economically from their support for the regime<sup>98</sup>—rather than an indication of genuine unity based on shared ideological convictions about the country’s future. Moreover, the support for the regime was also generated by a common fear among political elites, even including those wary of the regime, that politics without Putin (either as the president or as the prime minister) might well turn out to be much worse in the contemporary Russian context. The impact of the unstable Yeltsin era in term of shortening political elites’ time horizon was hard to reverse, and many of them remained skeptical of any grand designs for the future.<sup>99</sup> Most importantly, the historically-rooted ideational divide among political elites remained, as no consensus developed within the regime over whether Russia should liberalize further in order to be accepted into the West, or pursue an independent developmental path and build an alternative non-Western world order.<sup>100</sup> The idea that Russia’s international status should be that of a modern great power thus became the “lowest common denominator on which elites could agree.”<sup>101</sup> Beyond that, the only commitment most political elites shared was probably the commitment to survive and gain as much as possible in a political environment that seemed stable for the time being but fundamentally depended on cronyistic and personalistic power arrangements. It is to this personalization of elite politics in contemporary Russia that we now turn.

### The Personalization of Elite Politics in Russia

During the Yeltsin era, Russian politics remained highly personalized as enormous formal power became concentrated in the hands of the presidency. Although this kind of personalism brought the regime certain benefits, such as facilitating the building of new institutions and preventing Communist restoration, mostly it ended up weakening formal political institutions and fostering an “individualized, anti-procedural and anti-institutional” approach to governance and “crony capitalism.”<sup>102</sup> What this means is that whatever elite support there was for the regime was largely based on patron-client relationships rather than on any shared belief in longterm regime legitimacy. Over time, a not-so-implicit contract was formed between the regime leadership and the political elites in which the leadership tolerated rampant corruption and nepotism among political elites in exchange for their political cooperation or at least acquiescence. Such arrangement left little room for political elites to commit to the regime on anything beyond a contingent basis.

Unlike the Yeltsin regime, the Putin regime, despite its heavy-handedness, genuinely appealed to many political elites for its promises of providing domestic order and stability and restoring Russia's international prestige. But at a fundamental level, the personalization of elite politics continued, even intensifying under the Putin era.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, compared to the Yeltsin regime, the Putin regime was in a much stronger position, with more centralized power and more monetary resources generated by petrodollars, when dealing with political elites. First of all, under the current Russian regime, in addition to a political system marked by intricate personal ties,<sup>104</sup> a fusion of "power and property" is increasingly apparent, as indicated by the fact that almost all the key economic and corporate positions are now occupied by representatives of the political ruling circle.<sup>105</sup> In 2008, Russia's leading business daily, *Vedomosti*, estimated that the "political and personal allies" of the president headed the boards of companies that together accounted for 40 percent of the country's economy;<sup>106</sup> thus, the political elites were invested in the status quo under the Putin regime. Moreover, the regime was able to use personnel arrangements to effectively co-opt some political elites that could potentially challenge it. The 2008 appointment by presidential decree of the popular nationalist Dmitry Rogozin, the former head of the Rodina party, as Russia's ambassador to NATO, was such an example<sup>107</sup> —even though the job was a highly prestigious one, this move also pushed a powerful politician away from the central political playing field. Another earlier example is the 2001 appointment of Viktor Chernomyrdin, a former prime minister and a powerful oligarch, to the post of Russian ambassador to Ukraine in order to distance him from the center of Russian politics. Finally, under the current Russian regime, the *siloviki* (people who had worked for the security forces) became a larger and more influential group among political elites. According to a 2006 study by the Russian Academy of Sciences, people with a security background filled 77 percent of Russia's top 1,016 governmental positions.<sup>108</sup> Many of Russia's largest companies and media organizations were also headed by former security forces men with personal ties to Putin. The prominence of the *siloviki*, who preserve a high level of in-group solidarity and loyalty, ensures the political elites' subservience to the regime as a group. Therefore, the apparent elite support that the current regime commands rests upon extensive and carefully configured personalistic and cronyistic power arrangements.

So far, this system has worked well, as the regime is yet to face any serious domestic political challenge. However, such a system could not and will not be able to solve the problem of ideational fragmentation among the Russian political elites, making it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for them to overcome the problem of collective action in order to cooperate with each other over a common ideological project sponsored by the regime.<sup>109</sup> The contract between the regime leadership and the political elites has not changed fundamentally since the Yeltsin era. Despite the political elites' apparent support for the regime, formal political institutions in Russia remain weak and lack popular legitimacy, which further contributes to elite apathy.<sup>110</sup> In other words, although the regime enjoys elite support so far, this support could translate neither into a high level of legitimacy of formal political institutions nor into ideational unity among the political elites. This is unlikely to change in the current context, especially given the fact that longterm regime stability will necessarily require a structural change of the current personalized system that has been benefiting these elites so far. During the recent global financial crisis, the drop in oil prices and the crashing of the capital market delivered a huge blow to the

Russian economy,<sup>111</sup> exposing the fragility of the country's previous economic success. Discontent rose among elites whose economic interests had been hurt severely, and there were speculations about a possible rift between Putin and Medvedev.<sup>112</sup> If previously the regime could maintain a façade of overall elite unity while the economy was going strong and the money kept flowing, this façade could become seriously strained once the regime fails to come up with effective measures to protect the elites' economic interests.<sup>113</sup> In that event, the Kremlin's ability to rally the political elites could diminish further, and its effort to formulate a viable regime ideology supported by elites will become even more futile.

### Conclusion

This paper shows that the fact that the current Russian regime has yet to solidify a clear and coherent new ideology largely stems from two major sources: the incoherence of the regime's ideological repertoire, and the relative weakness of Russian political elite's commitment to the regime's ideological projects. Consequently, the regime had to "muddle through" a rather inconsistent assortment of selected elements from the past(s), only to arrive at vague concepts devoid of any concrete socioeconomic programs, such as "sovereign democracy," to define itself. This kind of fundamental ambiguity could have far-reaching implications, both domestically and internationally.

Domestically, the absence of a clear ideology means that although the current regime is in no present crisis and is able to appeal to different parts of the electorate, public support for the regime is still largely dependent on its performance (which is indicated, most of all, by the ability to deliver economic growth and to raise Russia's international status), rather than on any kind of consistent ideals it embodies. Moreover, the fact that the regime is yet to have an ideological hold over political elites means that elite support for the regime remains relatively contingent, hinging mostly on extensive personalistic and cronyistic power arrangements. Therefore, a bad economic environment is inherently dangerous for the regime, as both public support and elite support could potentially unravel if the regime turns out to be consistently unable to deliver expected performance over time. If that happens, we can expect to see the regime resorting to harsher and more authoritarian measures to maintain its hold on both the masses and the elites.

Internationally, since the emphasis on Russia being a great power is the one idea that the regime and the majority of political elites can all agree upon, foreign policy has become the area of consensus that plays a significant role in maintaining the vitality of the system.<sup>114</sup> The 2008 war with Georgia, for example, was overwhelmingly supported by both the public and the elites in Russia.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, despite the regime's apparent pragmatism internationally, such as its recent *détente* with the Obama administration, there is still room for unpredictable development. If the regime's domestic control weakens, it is not inconceivable that it will resort to a more assertive, even aggressive international stance—especially with regard to its "special interests" in the "Near Abroad" such as Georgia and Ukraine—in order to shore up public and elite support.

These domestic and international implications seem to spell trouble for the Russian regime in the future, especially after Putin is gone. The past decade, however, has shown the regime's ability to adapt to and deal with various challenges. What this paper does show

is that the sources of the regime's inability to come up with a clear and viable ideology are unlikely to change in the present context, and that this search does, and will remain, an elusive goal as a result. Thus, the longterm future of the Russian regime beyond Putin is still very much an open question.

## NOTES

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1. Since 2004, Freedom House has downgraded Russia from the category of “partially free” to the category of “Not Free” because of the Putin regime’s increasing restrictions of political rights and civil liberties.

2. See, for example, Harley Balzer, “Managed Pluralism: Vladimir Putin’s Emerging Regime,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 3 (2003): 189–227; and Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Putin as a Flexible Politician. Does he Imitate Stalin?,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): 205–216.

3. Although the Soviet regime could be quite pragmatic at times, such as during the Brezhnev era when black market and blat were being tacitly tolerated and the regime pursued detente with the West, the official ideological commitment to building socialism remained firm until the Soviet collapse.

4. See, for example, Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia’s Reforms: Market Bolshevism Against Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001); and Stephen Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001)

5. Richard Rose, Neil Munro, W. Mishler, “Resigned Acceptance of an Incomplete Democracy: Russia’s Political Equilibrium,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 20, no. 3 (2004): 195–218.

6. Stephen Hanson, “Instrumental Democracy: The End of Ideology and the Decline of Russian Political Parties,” in Vicki Hesli and William Reisinger, eds., *Elections, Parties, and the Future of Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 163–185.

7. News conference of presidential aide Vladislav Surkov on the official website of the G8 presidency of the Russian Federation in 2006, at <http://en.g8russia.ru/news/20060704/1168817.html> (accessed December 1, 2010), cited in Ken Jowitt, “Rus United,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 24, no. 4 (December 2008): 503. Surkov currently serves as the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office in Russia.

8. The representative major works focusing on the role of political ideologies in post-Communism with a comparative angle include Hilary Appel, *A New Capitalist Order: Privatization and Ideology in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); and Stephen E. Hanson, *Ideology, Uncertainty, and Democracy: Party Formation in Third Republic France, Weimar Germany, and Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

9. Here it should be emphasized that this paper’s use of the term “regime ideology” does not carry any derogatory connotations of such ideology being “false” as in the case of many kinds of “ism”s. Therefore, even a liberal democracy like the US could be considered as having a regime ideology that is committed to individualism-based liberal capitalist democracy with elements of “manifest destiny” such as the belief in the American “mission” to spread the American image and promote democracy. For a succinct discussion of the more general term “ideology,” which informs the definition of “regime ideology” here, please see Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

10. Although national ideology and regime ideology are conceptually distinctive and have different emphases, their goals sometimes could overlap, such as in many post-colonial contexts when the post-colonial regime is confronted with the dual challenges of regime-building and state-building.

11. See Graeme Gill and Roger Markwich, *Russia's Stillborn Democracy: From Gorbachev to Yeltsin* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Reddaway and Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms*.
12. See M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
13. See Philip Hanson, "The Russian Economic Crisis and the Future of Russian Economic Reform," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 7 (November 1999): 1141–1166.
14. Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 162–186.
15. See, for example, Richard Rose, "Russia as an Hour-Glass Society: A Constitution without Citizens," *East European Constitutional Review* 4, no. 3 (1995): 34–42; and Judith Kullberg and William Zimmerman, "Liberal Elites, Socialist Masses, and the Problems of Russian Democracy," *World Politics* 51 (1999): 323–358.
16. Philip Hanson, "The Russian Economic Recovery: Do Four Years of Growth Tell Us that the Fundamentals have Changed?" *Europe-Asia Studies* 55, no. 3 (2003): 365–382.
17. The number dropped a couple of times in 2010, but even the lowest "dip" was still around 60 percent.
18. Rudra Sil and Cheng Chen, "State Legitimacy and the (In)significance of Democracy in Post-Communist Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 3 (2004): 347–368.
19. Dale R. Herspring, ed., *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 3rd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 3. Putin made this claim in 1999 before he became the President of Russia.
20. This term was actually first coined by Sukarno of Indonesia, who claimed that Western-style democracy was unsuitable for Indonesia and that the country should be governed according to traditional principles. Sukarno used this idea as a pretext for his increasingly authoritarian rule.
21. See, for example, Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); and Perry Anderson, "Russia's Managed Democracy," *London Review of Books*, January 25, 2007. Other labels that have been used by political scientists to describe the contemporary Russian regime include "Potemkin democracy" and "competitive authoritarianism." For the former, see W. Clark, "Russia at the Polls, Potemkin Democracy," *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 2 (2004): 22–29. For the latter, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51–65.
22. "Russia's Week," *CDI Russia Weekly* 197, available at <http://www.cdi.org/russia/197-11.cfm> (accessed December 1, 2010).
23. Balzer, "Managed Pluralism," 190–191.
24. For the more general use of these terms on hybrid regimes, see Levitsky and Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism" and Fareed Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).
25. Vladislav Surkov, "Sovereignty is a political equivalent of competitiveness," February 7, 2006.
26. "News Conference of Presidential Aide Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration," Official Website of the G8 Presidency of the Russian Federation in 2006, available at <http://en.g8russia.ru/news/20060704/1168817.html> (accessed December 1, 2010).
27. Richard Sakwa, "Russian Political Culture Through the Eyes of Vladislav Surkov," *Russian Politics and Law* 46, no. 5 (2008): 5.
28. Eugene Ivanov, "'Sovereign Democracy: Is it United Russia's Ideology?'" *Johnson's Russia List*, January 21, 2007.
29. Examples include Nikita Garaja, *Sovereignty* (Moscow: Europe, 2006), and A. V. Fenenko, ed., *The Concept and Definition of Democracy* (Anthology) (Moscow: URSS, 2006).
30. This manual was titled "A Book for Teachers: The Modern History of Russia, 1945–2006." See Dmitry Babich, "On the Wrong Side of History: A New Teachers' Manual Provokes Debates," *Russia Profile*, July 25, 2007, available at <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/2007-161-6.cfm> (accessed December 1, 2010).

31. Putin never actually claimed that “sovereign democracy” was the regime’s official ideology.
32. For example, Medvedev’s interview for “Expert,” available at [http://www.expert.ru/expert/2006/28/interview\\_medvedev/](http://www.expert.ru/expert/2006/28/interview_medvedev/) (accessed December 1, 2010).
33. “Russia Profile Experts Panel: The Debate over Sovereign Democracy,” *Russia Profile*, September 22, 2006.
34. Cited in “The Rewriting of History,” *The Economist*, November 10, 2007.
35. Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 231.
36. For example, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia: 1928–1931* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
37. For a more detailed account of this process, see Cheng Chen, *The Prospects for Liberal Nationalism in Post-Leninist State* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2007), 45–75.
38. Leslie L. McGann, “The Russian Orthodox Church under Patriarch Aleksii II and the Russian State: An Unholy Alliance?” *Demokratizatsiya* 7, no. 1 (1999): 12–27.
39. See Nikolas K. Gvosdev, “The New Party Card? Orthodoxy and the Search for Post-Soviet Russian Identity,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 47, no. 6 (November/December 2000): 29–38.
40. For example, the New Russia Barometer survey of April 2000 indicates that 71 percent of respondents viewed the pre-Perestroika Soviet political system favorably (and 22 percent unfavorably) while 82 percent viewed the old economic system favorably (and 13 percent unfavorably). See New Russia Barometer IX, available at <http://www.russiavotes.org/rvwhatsnew.htm>. A 2001 poll conducted by the Public Opinion Fund found that 79 percent of Russians regretted the dissolution of the Soviet Union (the figure was 69 percent in 1992). See “Referendum on the Fate of the USSR: Ten Years Later,” available at [http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/problem\\_soc/collapse\\_FSU/ed010909](http://bd.english.fom.ru/report/cat/societas/problem_soc/collapse_FSU/ed010909).
41. It should be noted that pre-Soviet Russia did have multiple political traditions. For example, the more liberal strand was evident in, for example, Miliukovs and Kerensky of 1917, while the Slavophiles were more emphatic about the purity of the Russian soul, as represented by the peasantry. Yeltsin clearly emphasized the first element more as evidenced by his liberal reforms, while Putin and Medvedev tried to balance between these two elements by combining both the liberal tradition, especially in economic affairs, and the emphasis on the distinctiveness of Russia.
42. Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” December 30, 1999. Available at <http://www.geocities.com/capitolhill/parliament/3005/poutine.html> (accessed November 22, 2010).
43. Vladimir Putin, “Inaugural State-Of-The-Nation Address to the Russian Parliament,” July 8, 2000.
44. Victor Yasman, “Russia: New Russian Holiday has more Behind it than National Unity,” *RFE/RL*, November 23, 2010.
45. “Russian democracy should correspond to Russian traditions, universal values – Medvedev,” *RIA Novosti*, April 15, 2010.
46. Leon Aron, “Putinism,” *Russian Outlook*, AEI Online, May 8, 2008, available at [http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.27958/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.27958/pub_detail.asp) (accessed November 30, 2010).
47. See, for example, “Putin Expresses Gratitude to Church for Uniting Russian World,” *Itar-Tass*, June 28, 2008; and “Russian Orthodox Church to Work for Russian Identity – Putin,” *Interfax-Religion*, February 3, 2009.
48. “Russian President Outlines Principles of Relations between State and Church,” NTV, February 2, 2009, BBC Monitoring.
49. “New Supervisor of Religious Policy Appointed in Presidential Administration,” *Gazeta.ru*, April 27, 2010, available at [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/04/26\\_a\\_3358001.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/04/26_a_3358001.shtml) (accessed December 1, 2010).
50. Mansur Mirovalev, “Russian Orthodox Church a Growing Political Force,” *The Associated Press*, April 4, 2009. Church leaders have blessed the government’s plans to eliminate some social benefits for the elderly, called on Russia’s youth to volunteer for military services, and consecrated new warships and nuclear missiles, calling the latter “Russia’s guardian angels.”

51. Although most Russians do not regularly go to churches, a 2006 poll conducted by Izvestia and VTsIOM showed that 63 percent of respondents in Russia identified themselves as Orthodox Christians. See Georgiy Ilyichev and Boris Kliin, "Can One Only Believe in Russia?" *Izvestia*, December 23, 2006.
52. See Zoe Knox, "Russian Orthodoxy, Russian Nationalism, and Patriarch Aleksii II," *Nationalities Papers* 33, no. 4 (December 2005): 533–545; and James W. Warhola, "The Kremlin's Religion Temptation," *Current History* 106, no. 702 (October 2007): 340–345.
53. McDaniel, 162–186.
54. "Putin Calls for Soviet-Era Anthem, Czarist-Era Symbols," *The Associated Press*, December 5, 2000.
55. "Red Star set for Russian Comeback," BBC News, November 26, 2002, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2515515.stm> (accessed December 6, 2010).
56. Judyth L. Twigg, "What Has Happened to Russian Society?" in Andrew C. Kuchins, ed., *Russia After the Fall* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 159.
57. Vladimir Putin, "Annual State-Of-The-Nation Address to the Russian Parliament," April 24, 2005.
58. Vladislav Surkov, "Interview by Elena Ovcharenko and Larisa Kaftan," *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, September 28, 2004, available at [www.kp.ru/daily/23370/32473/print/](http://www.kp.ru/daily/23370/32473/print/) (accessed December 1, 2010).
59. Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 297.
60. "Russians Call Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 Biggest Event of the 20th Century," *Itar-Tass*, November 16, 2008. The space flight of Yuri Gagarin ranks second (13 percent).
61. For a detailed account of the role of Stalin in the forming of a new Russian national identity, see Veljko Vujacic, "Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, no. 2 (2007): 156–183.
62. "The Rewriting of History," *The Economist*, November 10, 2007.
63. Yuri Zarakhovich, "Putin Plays Follow the Leader: Is Stalin Coming Back in Style?" *Johnson's Russia List*, January 20, 2002. Also see Adrian Karanyky, "The Great Memory Purge," *Wall Street Journal Europe*, March 5, 2008.
64. Ariel Cohen, "Russia on the March: The Return of the Red Square Parades," The Heritage Foundation, February 11, 2008.
65. "Over 70% Russians Approve of Renewed Military Parades on Red Square," *Itar-Tass*, May 4, 2008.
66. "Put in More Flags," *The Economist*, May 16, 2009.
67. Pavel Felgenhauer, "Medvedev Forms a Commission to Protect Russian History," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no. 98, May 21, 2009.
68. For example, in April 2010, Putin became the first Russian leader to join Polish officials in commemorating the anniversary of the Katyn Massacre. In the same year, Putin called Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*—a book on the crimes of the Soviet regime—"essential reading" for Russian students. See Vladimir Isachenko, "Putin's Solzhenitsyn's Gulag Archipelago Essential," *The Associated Press*, October 26, 2010.
69. Arkady Ostrovsky, "Russia: Enigma Variations," *The Economist*, November 29, 2008.
70. "Attitudes on Stalin," *Gazeta.ru*, March 8, 2008. In 2003 the number was 53 percent.
71. "Most Russians Regret the Fall of The Soviet Union – Poll," *Interfax*, December 21, 2009.
72. John B. Dunlop, "Russia: In Search of an Identity?" in Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, eds., *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 55.
73. Anne Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 117.
74. *Johnson's Russia List*, February 5, 2004.
75. This poll was conducted by the All-Russia Center for the Study of Public Opinion. See "Russia has Bright Future in Poll," *Kommersant*, November 12, 2008.
76. McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea*, 21.

77. See The Levada Center, "Public Opinion on the Yeltsin Years," available at [http://www.rus-siavotes.org/president/yeltsin\\_public\\_opinion.php?S776173303132=9dfdd7e1487702e5ecb81a66d913152b#243](http://www.rus-siavotes.org/president/yeltsin_public_opinion.php?S776173303132=9dfdd7e1487702e5ecb81a66d913152b#243) (accessed December 2, 2010).
78. Leon Aron, "Was Liberty Really Bad for Russia? Part I," *Russian Outlook*, Summer 2007, available on-line at [www.aei.org/publication26600/](http://www.aei.org/publication26600/) (accessed December 2, 2010).
79. In 1999, Yeltsin appointed Putin as Russia's prime minister. At the end of the year, Yeltsin resigned and handed the presidency over to Putin.
80. Clunan, 102–103.
81. Ibid., 144.
82. Vladimir Putin, "State-Of-The-Nation Address to the Russian Parliament," April 18, 2002.
83. "Putin: Non-market economy performed well in the 1920-30s, then resulted in USSR collapse," *Johnson's Russia List*, June 14, 2005.
84. The limits to such commitments are clearly demonstrated by events such as the Yukos affair; the Khodorkovsky trials; and the regime's recent decision to pull the country out of WTO entry negotiations unless as a part of a customs union with Belarus and Kazakhstan (the regime blamed the US and EU for the collapse of its unilateral bid).
85. This survey was conducted by the polling firm Bashkirova & Partners in May 2008. 77.4 percent of the respondents listed culture and 75 percent listed scientific achievements. 60.7 percent pointed to the Russian armed forces and 55.6 percent to their country's influence in world affairs. Only 40.5 percent expressed pride in the country's economic achievements and just 37 percent felt the same way about the state of democracy in Russia. See "Russians see their history as the greatest source of pride," *Bigotry Monitor – UCSJ's Weekly Newsletter* 8, no. 25, June 20, 2008, available at <http://www.fsumonitor.com/stories/062008BM.shtml> (accessed December 2, 2010).
86. *Kommersant*, March 17, 2000, 2.
87. Marlene Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation: Nationalism and Politics in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 152.
88. Clunan, 117–118.
89. Gill and Markwick, 258.
90. During the Yeltsin era, the Duma did successfully block a number of presidential initiatives, such as key efforts to alter labor legislation and social policy.
91. The Yeltsin era came to an end right before 2000, at which point Russia was perceived as one of the top ten most corrupted countries in the world according to Transparency International. See "TI Corruption Perception Index, 2000," available at [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/previous\\_cpi/2000](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/previous_cpi/2000) (accessed December 2, 2010).
92. See Richard Rose, "Russia as an Hour-Glass Society: A Constitution without Citizens," *East European Constitutional Review* 4 (1995): 34–42; and Stephen White, *Russia's New Politics: The Management of a PostCommunist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144–181.
93. After his re-election in 1996, Yeltsin called upon his top campaign aids to form a commission to "give Russia an idea." The commission reached no definite conclusion. See Michael Urban, "Remythologising the Russian State," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 6 (1998): 969–1002.
94. Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Short Time Horizon in the Russian Mind," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 1–24.
95. For example, see Vladimir Shlapentokh, "How Putin's Russia Embraces Authoritarianism: The Case of Yegor Gaidar," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40 (2007): 493–499.
96. Richard Sakwa, "Regime Change from Yeltsin to Putin: Normality, Normalcy or Normalization?" in Cameron Ross, ed., *Russian Politics Under Putin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004): 17–36.
97. For example, the KPRF had been the most organized and popular political party in Russia until Putin managed to splinter it, cause defections to new, pro-Kremlin parties, and use Unity's ties to the Kremlin to push out KPRF leaders from key committee positions.
98. For example, see "Putin Elite Consolidates Its Position in Business Circle," *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 6, 2008, available at <http://rferl.org/newsline/2008/02/060208.asp#archive>

(accessed December 2, 2010). For further discussion, see the next subsection.

99. Shlapentokh, “The Short Time Horizon,” 16.

100. For example, see William Zimmerman, “Slavophiles and Westernizers Redux: Contemporary Russian Elite Perspectives,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2005): 183–209. Zimmerman argues that the fundamental divide among Russian elites is between Slavophiles and westernizers in a reprise of 19th-century debates, while others, such as Clunan, argue that there are more nuanced divides. According to Clunan, in contemporary Russia, elites of different ideological orientations include national-restorationists, neo-Communists, statists, Slavophiles, and westernizers.

101. Clunan, 116. Also see Lilia Shevtsova, “Russia and the West: A Liberal View,” OpenDemocracy.net, November 3, 2008.

102. George W. Breslauer, “Personalism versus Proceduralism: Boris Yeltsin and the Institutional Fragility of the Russian System,” in Victoria E. Bonnell and George W. Breslauer, eds., *Russia in the New Century: Stability or Disorder?* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001): 35–38.

103. Lilia Shevtsova, “The Return of Personalized Power,” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 2 (April 2009): 61–65.

104. The importance of such ties is highlighted, most prominently, by the choice of Medvedev by Putin as his successor. They worked together in St. Petersburg in 1990–1991 under Major Sobchak, and then Putin brought Medvedev with him in Moscow in 1999. Medvedev was Putin’s chief of staff during his tenure as prime minister and then as president. He had also been the head of Gazprom and the first deputy prime minister under Putin. After Medvedev became the president, many powerful Kremlin aides from the Putin era stayed on.

105. “Putin Elite Consolidates Its Position in Business Circles,” *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 6, 2008, available at <http://rferl.org/newsline/2008/02/060208.asp#archive> (accessed December 1, 2010).

106. Leon Aron, “The Merger of Power and Property,” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 2 (April 2009): 66. These companies include Gazprom; Rosneft; Channel One, which is the largest TV network in Russia; railways; a big cellphone company, and the oil-export monopoly.

107. Previously Rogozin had criticized the corrupted nature of the Putin regime. Given the popularity of Rodina, an alliance with the Communists could potentially make United Russia lose control over the Duma. Such a scenario would be highly undesirable for the regime.

108. “Russia: Expert Eyes Security Ties among Siloviki,” December 20, 2006, available at [www.rferl.org/content/article/1073593.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1073593.html) (accessed December 2, 2010). Cited in Andrei Illarionov, “The Siloviki in Charge,” *Journal of Democracy* 20:2 (April 2009): 70.

109. The argument that common ideological beliefs could create a longer time horizon for politicians to overcome collective action problems is elaborated within the context of party politics in Stephen E. Hanson, *Ideology, Uncertainty, and Democracy: Party Formation in Third Republic France, Weimar Germany, and Post-Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), Chapter 1.

110. The trust ratings for the country’s political institutions were among the lowest in the world. See Vladimir Shlapentokh, “Trust in Public Institutions in Russia: The Lowest in the World,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 (2006): 153–174. Also see Sil and Chen, 2005.

111. In the first quarter of 2009, Russian economy shrank by 9.5 percent year on year, and industrial output tumbled by almost 15 percent.

112. Arkady Ostrovkey, “Reversal of Fortune,” *Foreign Policy* (March/April 2009). Also see “Russia – Surkov attack suggests infighting intensifies,” US Open Source Center, March 31, 2009.

113. Pavel Baev, “Putin is rapidly losing his ‘father-of-the-nation’ image in Russia: Economic catastrophe propels Russia into an identity crisis,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 2, 2009.

114. Shevtsova, 64.

115. “Impervious to War, Inflation, and Foreign Barbs, Russian Pride Grows,” *RFE/RL*, September 23, 2008.