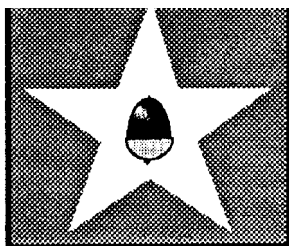


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**Putin's Regime:
Administered Democracy**

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PUTIN'S REGIME: ADMINISTERED DEMOCRACY

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The election of Vladimir Putin as president of the Russian Federation on 26 March 2000 should resolve the issue of who is to lead Russia for at least the next 4 years, and probably longer. Putin's inauguration on 7 May marks the formal beginning of his presidency, and he is likely to start charting his own course for Russia. Whilst he may avoid any drastic break with the Yel'tsinite legacy, Putin is likely to make changes that could significantly alter Russia's socio-political and economic landscape.

The election of Putin and the Duma election of December 1999 were very probably an accurate expression of the will of the electorate. However it remains an open question as to whether the Kremlin would allow its own candidates to be defeated, or if defeated, whether they would submit to the verdict of the electorate and step down. The Duma election of December 1999 was a highly managed affair, with the state media showing considerable favour towards the pro-Putin Yedinstvo (Unity) movement and strong pressure was put on the electorate in some regions of Russia to vote for Putin in the presidential election. It seems reasonable to argue that although Russia possesses many of the key characteristics of a democracy, she does not possess them all, as it is not clear whether the Kremlin establishment's presidential candidate can ever be removed from the presidency if the electorate so desires.

ADMINISTERED DEMOCRACY

The Russian political system under Yel'tsin and so far under Putin remains a curious hybrid, combining elements of authoritarianism with elements of representative democracy, along with arbitrariness and kleptocracy.¹ To the extent that it is democratic, it may be described as an "administered democracy." Vitaly Tret'yakov defines "administered democracy" as a "democracy (elections, choice, freedom of speech and the press, changing of leaders of the regime), which is corrected by the ruling class."² By "corrected" Tret'yakov presumably means the ruling class's interference to ensure that presidential elections have the correct result. Sergey Markov outlines the concept in relation to Putin's presidency further in an article he wrote in March 2000, entitled "manipulated democracy."³ Markov considered that Russia's administered democracy under Putin has the following traits:

1. A regime with an extremely strong presidency, which is personally dominated by Putin; similar to Charles de Gaulle's domination of the Fifth French republic.
2. Parliament is dominated by a pro-government majority, and the power of the legislature in relation to the presidency remains weak.
3. The centre will gain control over regional leaders. It will be impossible for regional leaders to act in a semi-autonomous fashion. Putin will create a single politico-legal space throughout the Russian Federation.

4. A two party system will emerge. This will not be like that of the USA or Britain, where one party can replace the other as the governing party. It will be similar to the post-war political systems of Japan and Italy, which were dominated for many years by a centre-right party, where different factions within the party vied for control of the government. The left opposition party had no real hope of coming to power. Other parties were legally permitted, but marginalised.
5. Elections remain a feature of the political system, with a relatively honest counting of votes. The winner is therefore known in advance because in his support are concentrated the nation's main financial, informational and administrative-political resources.
6. Civil freedoms are largely preserved. However it will be impossible to create a powerful political organisation, capable of mounting a real challenge to the current Kremlin. The fate of the opposition Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya movement created in 1999 is an example of how the establishment will neutralise any potentially powerful opposition movement.
7. Mass media will remain largely in private hands. However the ruling establishment will exercise control over the mass media through financial-political control over their owners. Mass media will play an important role in manipulating public opinion.

These characteristics are largely accurate. The comparison with the Italian and Japanese party systems is slightly misleading, as the state would not subvert the electoral process to ensure the electoral success of the centre-right parties in these countries. The same can be said of the comparison between Putin and de Gaulle. Although both Russia and France have extremely powerful presidencies, it cannot be confidently argued that de Gaulle would have used the French state to neutralise the Socialist opposition in France and to manipulate the electoral process.

The significant feature of administered democracy is that it does not enable the electorate to remove from power the current president, and administered democracy could perhaps be better described as a form of elective dictatorship. A useful comparison could perhaps be made with the Mexican political system prior to the presidential election of July 2000.⁴ The pre-2000 system was ostensibly a pluralist multiparty democracy, yet was dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which won every election from 1929 to 1994, and until the change in attitude in 2000, was unlikely to permit any rival party to win a presidential election. The old Mexican political system has been described as a "hybrid regime type with...careful democratic reformist strategies constituting aspects of the system that moderate its basic authoritarian features."⁵ This definition could arguably be applied to the contemporary Russian political system.

THE PUTINITE STATE

Putin is a *gosudarstvennik* (statist), who advocates an extremely strong state. He favours a powerful presidency and is opposed to any constitutional reform that would weaken it vis-à-vis the legislative branch of power. He has spoken in favour of prolonging the presidential term from four years to seven years, and says that this change should be approved by the population (presumably in a referendum) and should apply to the president elected in 2004.

He appears to desire a paternalist state, which closely supervises political, economic and social processes in Russia. In his December 1999 essay *Russia at the Turn of the Millennium*, he wrote:

*Russia will not become a second edition of, say, the US or Britain, where liberal values have deep historic traditions. Our state and its institutions and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and its people. For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to be gotten rid of...it is a source of order and the driving force of any change.*⁶

He argues that "Russians are alarmed by the obvious weakening of state power. The public looks forward to a certain restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state, proceeding from Russia's traditions as well as the current state of the country."⁷

He says that the state should play a strong role in overseeing economic reform. He says that he intends to make "the Russian state an efficient coordinator of the country's economic and social forces, balancing out their interests, optimizing the aim and parameters of social development."⁸

He wishes to make the state more efficient, and advocates the following measures:⁹

- Streamlining state agencies and improving governance; increasing professionalism, discipline and responsibility among civil servants and intensifying the struggle against corruption
- Reforming state personnel policy through the selection of best staffs
- Creating conditions that will help develop a full-blooded civil society to balance out and monitor the authorities
- Increasing the role and authority of the judicial branch of government
- Improving federative relations (including budetary and financial)
- Launching an active and aggressive campaign against crime.

Putin is at pains to make clear that he intends that the state system be democratic, not authoritarian. However, in view of the fact that the post-communist Russian establishment, led first by Yel'tsin and now by Putin is not prepared to permit opposition forces to come to power, it is not impossible that he will adopt a more authoritarian style of leadership, where the state plays a more active role in intimidating opponents. His respect for Yury Andropov, who headed the KGB during the Brezhnev era and who was General-Secretary of the CPSU from 1982 until February 1984 may give some indication of his likely outlook. A key feature of Putin's rule may consist of utilising the internal security organs to maintain the current status quo within the framework of an ostensibly democratic system.

Putin's expressed wish to combat corruption and organised crime may well be used to neutralise opponents. On 20 April, Anatoly Chubays said that "it will be necessary to undertake colossal, very difficult efforts to reduce the number of civil servants, increase wages, and conduct a merciless, total anti-corruption campaign,

which will be accompanied by criminal trials and the jailing of many high-level state officials."¹⁰ The raids on Media-Most which is owned by Vladimir Gusinskiy, an oligarch opposed to Putin, and on the Internet Service Provider Xenon in May 2000 could form part of a trend to intimidate the media and opponents of the current leadership. The arrest of Vladimir Gusinsky in June 2000, ostensibly for fraud, could also be viewed in this light.

Putin's own comments on the possible introduction of legal sanctions for Russian citizens having too close ties with foreigners is also reminiscent of a state that does more than use the media to influence the opinion of its citizens and manipulate the outcome of elections. On 14 April he said:

*If the minister of foreign affairs is caught maintaining contacts with representatives of foreign states outside the framework of his official duties, he, like any other members of the government, deputies of the State Duma, heads of factions, and any other citizens of the Russian Federation, will be subject to certain procedures in line with the criminal law. And I must say that the recent actions the Federal Security Service have been taking demonstrate that this is quite possible.*¹¹

This statement denotes a state that intensifies its control over its citizens and will play an intimidatory role if the leadership deems it necessary. For this reason it is likely that the internal security organs (the Interior Ministry, Federal Security Service, FAPSI, presidential guard service etc.) could play a more important role under Putin than they did under Yel'tsin. Putin has put much emphasis on fighting terrorism, and an anti-terrorist struggle could be used as a pretext for strengthening the coercive role of the state.

A further indication of Putin's interest in exercising greater control over political processes in Russian society can be seen in the role possibly envisaged for the presidential administration (*administratsiya prezidenta* - AP). There are proposals to enhance the role of the AP in the political system, making greater use of the internal security organs to do so. If implemented, the AP would play a similar role to the CPSU in the pre-Gorbachev political system, where it acted as the guiding and leading force of society. This would further enable the Kremlin to neutralise any possible threats to its hegemony emanating from the Duma, political parties, media and regional leaders.¹²

PUTIN AND THE REGIONS

Putin has already moved decisively to enhance the power of the Russian state by seeking to establish greater federal control over the regions. Throughout the 1990s, power haemorrhaged from the federal government to the 89 regions of the Russian Federation. The federal government in Moscow was unable to enforce effectively its will throughout the country. Putin is already acting more decisively than Yel'tsin to reverse this trend, and strengthen Russian statehood. There was speculation that Putin might abolish elected governors and instead appoint them. However he has dismissed this notion. He has instead taken several other measures.

Yel'tsin was unwilling to block monetary transfers from the federal budget to regions that defied Moscow, Putin may be more willing to do so. Putin is also more likely than Yel'tsin to insist on appointing personnel to local branches of federal

agencies. Yel'tsin had been content to let regional governors make the appointments. Putin has talked about financing all levels of the judicial system from the federal budget, which would reduce the influence of regional bosses over the courts.

Not long after his inauguration on 7 May, Putin criticised regional leaders for disregarding the federal constitution. He ordered Bashkortostan to bring its constitution into line with the federal one, and overturned decrees issued by the president of Ingushetia and the head of the Amur region.

The most significant step so far, however, has been the presidential decree issued on 13 May, which created seven districts (*okrug*), each one headed by a presidential representative to ensure that federal government policy is enforced in the regions. This enables Putin to ensure control over the regions through means of a presidential appointee, whilst also maintaining the principle of elected governors. Putin has also introduced bills to parliament that will enable the federal president to dismiss regional leaders and dissolve regional parliaments that enact laws that contradict the federal constitution. These bills are currently being discussed by parliament.

THE FEDERATION COUNCIL

Putin also intends to reform the Federation Council. It is proposed that regional governors and chairman of regional legislatures will no longer sit in the Federation Council. They will be replaced by directly elected senators. By being deprived of the right to sit in the upper house of the national parliament, governors and presidents will be deprived of legal immunity, which will thus make them more vulnerable to legal pressures from the federal centre.

THE GOVERNMENT

Under Putin, the government (ie cabinet of ministers) will play a technical role, largely concerned with implementing and overseeing economic reform. The government is headed by Mikhail Kasyanov, a financial specialist. Several ministries and state committees have been abolished: this appears to be part of Putin's drive to streamline the state machine. He has cut the number of ministries from 30 to 24 and the number of government agencies from 39 to 33. He has also abolished the post of first deputy prime minister and cut the number of deputy prime ministers from seven to five.

Putin appears strongly committed to a liberal economic reform strategy. In April 2000 he appointed Andrey Illarionov as his personal economic adviser. Illarionov is strongly committed to liberal economic reforms. The Russian government is optimistic about Russia's growth prospects. In April, Putin noted that the country's economy was developing better than was envisaged in the 2000 budget. He commented that the economy had grown at about 8 per cent in the first quarter of 2000. He argued that it gave reason to suppose that the forecasts for Russia's economic development would be better and the economy would develop more energetically in 2001.¹³

In December 1999 Putin set up a Centre for Strategic Studies headed by German Gref to develop an economic reform plan for Russia.¹⁴ This plan, entitled *Russia's Development Strategy to the year 2010* was completed in May 2000.¹⁵ The development strategy aims at a drastic modernisation of the Russian economy in order to avoid the danger of Russia finding itself on the periphery of the civilised world as a result of its growing lag in the social, technological and economic fields. The strategy aims to more than double average per capita incomes and increase the percentage of people who have assumed responsibility for their own well-being.

Gref's plan envisages large-scale deregulation resulting in the unfettering of business initiative which will hopefully lead to the development of small and medium sized businesses. It also envisages a substantial reduction in the state's role as a provider of social services to the population. Gref argues that the implementation of his plan must ensure an average annual growth of GDP of at least 5-6 per cent up to 2010. This will make it possible to increase GDP by at least 70 per cent by 2010. He says that in some years growth may accelerate to 8-10 per cent. Economic growth must exceed the growth of the world economy.

The development strategy is extremely ambitious in its scope and optimistic, probably excessively so, in its expectations. The government is likely to modify it, but it is likely that any initial economic strategy adopted by the government will be extremely liberal in orientation. The first steps taken by the government indicate its desire to pursue such an approach. If reform plans become bogged down, or fail to bring the desired results, then Putin may find himself under pressure to shift towards a more dirigiste approach.

THE DUMA

Unlike Yel'tsin, Putin is likely to have a good working relationship with the Duma. Pro-presidential forces are stronger in the Duma elected in 1999 than the ones elected in 1993 and 1995. The Duma voted to accept Putin's nomination of Mikhail Kasyanov as prime minister by a strong majority (325 votes to 55. There were 15 abstentions). The Yedinstvo movement led Sergey Shoygu, minister of civil defence and emergency situations is effectively a pro-Putin party and will render him loyal support in the Duma. Putin also enjoys support from the Zhirinovskiy Bloc, and qualified support from the Union of Rightist Forces (URF). The Otechestvo movement led by Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov was initially opposed to Putin, but it now gives conditional support to him.

The CPRF only provides ritual opposition. More principled opposition comes from Yabloko, but this movement is too small to be able to make any decisive impact. Relationships between the different Duma factions remain fluid, and there have been talks between Yabloko and the URF about forming an alliance.¹⁶ This may result in some elements of the URF opposing Putin.

YEDINSTVO

It is quite likely that the Yedinstvo movement will become a tool of the state under Putin. He attended the founding congress of Yedinstvo in February 2000. Shoygu described Yedinstvo at this founding congress as a conservative movement and compared it to the Gaullist movement in France and the Japanese Liberal

Democratic Party.¹⁷ Shoygu and Yedinstvo strongly supported Putin in the presidential election campaign. Yedinstvo transformed itself into a political party at its congress in May 2000. At this congress, Nash Dom Rossiya, the Party of Russian Unity and Accord and Vsyā Rossiya all merged with Yedinstvo. The new party claims a membership of 120,000, making it the second largest party in the Russian Federation after the Communist Party. It has the second largest faction in the Duma, with 84 deputies (the CPRF has 88).

Putin attended the May congress. Although he is not a member of Yedinstvo, and like Yel'tsin, he is likely to remain officially "above party," he sees Yedinstvo as an important ally. In his speech at the May congress, he called upon Yedinstvo to become a "bulwark" of state power. He urged that it expand its membership so that the population can be closely linked to the state. He said:

*the economic and state reforms need a reliable, political bulwark. The citizens of Russia should have the opportunity to engage in matters of state and take an active part in the party's work. So far, however, we have been faced, unfortunately, only with weakness of state institutions as well as with weakness of civil society. It is the party's task to overcome this weakness and to attract as many people as possible into its organizations. A political party can become a partner and a bulwark of the authorities only when it is itself involved in forming these authorities. We know that Yedinstvo has entered into this process.*¹⁸

Putin envisages Yedinstvo establishing deep roots in Russian society, so tying large strata of the population to the regime and mobilising society to achieve the regime's goals.

THE OLIGARCHS

It is unclear what Putin's relations with the oligarchs will be. He was strongly supported by Boris Berezovskiy during the presidential election campaign. During the campaign Putin said that the state should not show favour to the oligarchs, that they should be equal before the law. However, given the strong control they exercise over the economy, it will be extremely difficult for him to reduce their economic and political power, should he desire to do so. The only oligarch who has so far been severely dealt with since Putin's election is Vladimir Gusinskiy, who is opposed to the president.

CONCLUSIONS

Putin desires to develop an ostensibly democratic system, but which is in essence authoritarian. This is partly motivated by the need to prevent centrifugal tendencies from undermining the statehood of the Russian Federation. He wishes to develop a streamlined and more efficient state machine; in contrast to the bloated state machine of the Soviet and Yel'tsin eras. The need to combat corruption and organised crime and also to neutralise legitimate political opponents may result in increased coercion. An indication of how this system intends to deal with political processes in society may come in autumn when elections are due to take place in several regions.

Putin's semi-authoritarian political system intends to administer a programme of extremely liberal economic reforms that aim at bringing about a rapid development of the Russian economy. In this respect Putin's regime can be compared with the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile (1973-1989), which implemented extremely radical free market reforms. If Putin's economic programme imposes heavy social costs on Russian society, then an authoritarian system may well be necessary in order to prevent any possible resistance to the programme.

If economic reforms fail, and society becomes disenchanted with Putin, then the temptation to utilise more authoritarian methods and possibly seek scapegoats will become stronger. Putin's use of the Chechen conflict to propel himself to power indicates the potential ruthlessness of his leadership, and a resort to more authoritarian methods should not be ruled out.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Archie Brown, 'Russia and Democratization,' Problems of Post-Communism, 46, 5, September-October 1999, p3-13, and his article 'The Russian Crisis: beginning of the end or end of the beginning?' Post-Soviet Affairs, 15, 1, January 1999, p56-73.
- ² Vitaly Tret'yakov, 'Diagnosis: administered democracy,' Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 13 January 2000.
- ³ Sergey Markov, 'Manipulated democracy,' Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2 March 2000.
- ⁴ The presidential election was won by Vicente Fox of the National Action Party.
- ⁵ See Martin Needler, An Introduction to Latin American Politics: The Structure of Conflict, Second Edition, Englewood Cliffs NJ, Prentice-Hall Inc., 1983, p26.
- ⁶ This essay appears as an appendix to Vladimir Putin's book First Person, London, Hutchinson, 2000, p214.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid, p214-215.
- ⁹ Ibid, p215.
- ¹⁰ Russian Public TV, 2015 GMT, 20 April 2000.
- ¹¹ Ekho Moskvyy Radio, 1800 gmt, 14 April 2000.
- ¹² See the documents outlining a proposed reform of the presidential administration which were reportedly leaked to Kommersant-Vlast' and published in Kommersant-Vlast', 9 May 2000, p18-25.
- ¹³ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) SU/3821, 21 April 2000.
- ¹⁴ For a brief history of the Centre for Strategic Studies see Bernd Knabe, Putins "Strategiezentrum", Bundesinstitut fuer ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, Aktuelle Analysen, Nr 27/2000 5 May 2000.
- ¹⁵ The text of Russia's Development Strategy to the year 2010 can be found on <http://www.russianembassy.org/RUSSIA/Russia-2010.htm>
- ¹⁶ SWB SU/3871, 20 June 2000.
- ¹⁷ Lidiya Andrusenko, 'Putin wants to remain above the fray,' Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 29 February 2000.
- ¹⁸ SWB SU/3852, 29 May 2000.

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