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The Birth of the Federation: Origins of the Russian Struggle for Democracy

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ORIGINS OF THE RUSSIAN STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

Boris Yeltsin and his trusted deputies gathered around the table. A big question was supposed to be decided that day: a question that would fundamentally change the course of a nuclear superpower for decades to come. The anxiety in the room was unbearable: some deputies wiped their sweat with napkins, others silently tapped their feet underneath the table, and the rest hid their eyes in the notebooks full of information that was already well memorized by everyone inside. At last, Boris Yeltsin stood up, took several long sips from the water bottle, placed it firmly on the desk beside him and began his address to the deputies: "A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking. Let us examine the points in which it varies from pure democracy, and we shall comprehend both the nature of the cure and the efficacy which it must derive from the Union."

The deputies in the room all nodded in agreement as the president took his seat. Next to speak was his vice-president Alexander Rutskoy. Known for his exceptionally bushy mustache and powerful ideation, Rutskoy stood up to continue the meeting:

> "The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended… Under such a regulation, it may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose. On the other hand, the effect may be inverted. Men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs, may, by intrigue, by corruption, or by other means, first obtain the suffrages, and then betray the interests, of the people."

After Rutskoy sat down, the room erupted with questions. “What do you propose then? How do we get the proper government and a proper constitution in the Russian Federation? How shall we structure the government? Republic? What of equality? What of democracy?” The room disintegrated into absolute chaos: deputies began arguing with one another, throwing papers, muttering and slamming the table with their fists. Rutskoy and Yeltsin looked at one another with a mutual feeling of frustration.

“Enough!” said the president with a strong and powerful voice, a voice that was famous throughout Russia. “Enough, comrades!”

The room began to settle down. Some deputies began picking up the scattered papers while others took their debates to the level of a barely audible whisper.

“I heard some of you say equality…and I heard others say democracy.” Yeltsin took another sip of his water, and stood up while loosening his tie. He then proceeded to address the concerns of the deputies with one of the most famous statements in the history of Russian politics:

> “From this view of the subject it may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction… Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would, at the same time, be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.”

The room was silent. The deputies listened to Yeltsin with great attention – some even took notes of his address. The latter was a turning point in Russian political history. It revealed the fact that even the former members of the Communist party and the late children of the Soviet Union understood, if only partially, the direction toward which they must take Russia. They became skeptical of democracy and

skeptical of equality. They understood that a republican form of government was the only solution for a nation as large and as powerful as their motherland. Indeed, after this famous meeting of Yeltsin and his trusted deputies, the Russian parliament drafted a truly magnificent constitution that secured the rights and liberties of Russians for many decades to come.

However, there is only one problem: the latter meeting never took place. Boris Yeltsin and Alexander Rutskoy never uttered those words of political wisdom, and the Russian parliament never drafted a "magnificent constitution." The only real aspects of the meeting were the excerpted quotes; although they too were borrowed from a very distant source: James Madison's reflections in Federalist 10. In that case, what type of reasoning serves as a foundation for the Russian system of government? What types of debates were held about its constitution? What was the pathway toward liberty and political enlightenment?

As a Russian citizen, it saddens me to say that the enlightenment that millions have hoped for after decades of misery and tyranny was far too dark and bleak. A great potential for a new society was never realized, and those who freed the Soviet people from the shackles of totalitarianism did not unlock the heavy door that guards the actual prison.

However, where did it all go wrong? What changed the plans of Yeltsin and his fellow reformers? Or was Russian society simply not ready for a sharp transition from communism to capitalism? In this thesis, I shall attempt to answer the latter questions by analyzing the following three things: first, I will take a look at the nature of Russian statism and examine the origins of power in the current Russian political system; second, I will expand on the historical significance of the most influential individual in modern Russian history; and third, I will conclude by explaining the most current state of Russian politics and its future potential. In order to assist me with the aforementioned

objectives, I shall employ an arsenal of unique Russian documents, interviews, debates, books, and other literature that has not been widely translated into English. My goal is to illuminate the shadows of modern Russian history by magnifying the subtle, and revealing the unknown. Only then can we hope to understand the incredibly complex transformation of the Russian state and its future legacy.

Part One: Russian Statism

When analyzing the nature of the Russian political system, it becomes impossible not to mention the concept of statism. Statism, broadly defined, is a system of government that maintains super-dominance of the central state over all local and regional governments. Statism is different from communism, Marxism or socialism primarily because it does not require a commitment to a particular political ideology.

Modern Russian statism revealed itself just as the legacy of the Soviet Union ended and a new era in Russian history began. Old ideas were replaced with new slogans, and the new principles disguised the old wounds. In a way this was reform; but one cannot label this reform to be fully or even partially successful. It is almost as if an old and rusty car were cleaned, and given a new exterior, while the faulty internal components remained unfixed. Therefore, it would be nearly impossible to identify any flaws within the new system until enough time would pass to notice its structural inadequacies. In this sense, it becomes reasonable to label statism observed in modern Russia as “masked” or “hidden,” for it tends to sneak in the shadows of the country’s legal system and block the true reform designed to expand individual

liberty.

On the other hand, it would be fair to point out similarities between the political system of Russia and the system of the Soviet Union. After all, was not the oppressive nature of the Soviet state also masked and hidden from the most immediate perception of its citizens? When subject to similar comparisons, the term “masked statism” becomes easily applicable not only to the contemporary Russian system, but also to the Soviet state.

However, to use the terms “total statism” and “masked statism” interchangeably serves as an injustice to the truth. While the Soviet state undoubtedly hid its oppression by calling it patriotism, the Russian state currently operates by different means and through a different environment altogether. The latter difference in conditions thus evolves the nature of the state into a mutating virus, which becomes impossible to treat with the previously devised remedy. While the goal of the Soviet Union was a series of openly upheld principles of Marxism, the goal of the Russian state is a series of openly upheld principles of democratic liberalism. Consequently, direct ideological positions against socialism and Marxism can no longer unravel the devastating influence of the new structure, for such principles are already “technically” rejected.

However, to begin understanding the differences between masked statism and total statism, it is initially important to establish that it is, after all, the same species of government. Our attention must now turn toward identifying the operational platform of masked statism to see how well it compares to that of the total state. Indeed, if the old principles upon which the

Soviet state was built are publically rejected, where is the foundation for the new state? The answer is simple: statism in modern Russia is institutional, and has a firm stronghold inside the supreme law of the nation.

Section 2, chapter 4 of the Russian Constitution is the largest chapter in the entire document. With 47 articles, the chapter is titled "Rights and Liberties of Man and Citizen." If the nation was founded upon the principles of capitalism, democracy, and individual liberty, the chapter would have probably contained restrictions on government power in respect to abridging "natural" or "unalienable" rights. However, this portion of the Russian Constitution provides rights to its citizens through the power of the state itself: "The State shall guarantee the equality of rights and freedoms of man and citizen…" (Article 17). Therefore, the state, not God or nature, becomes the provider of human rights and subjects the individual to the same social environment as the one under a total Soviet state. Such institutional rights include: "protection against unemployment" (Article 37); right to "be guaranteed social security at the expense of the State in old age" (Article 39); "right to a home" (Article 40); right "to health protection and medical aid" that shall be "financed by the State" (Article 41); right to a "favorable environment" (Article 42); "right to education" (Article 43); and so on. In these conditions, the government does not allow the individual to develop in a true state of liberty, and creates a program for nearly every step of the citizen's life. From his or her very birth, the citizen is promised a house, good education, protection from unemployment, medical services and even a healthy environment. The person does not labor to provide for his/her self and family, but labors to provide for everyone else; for the magnitude of the state's influence is so

wide and intrusive, it has to gather its strength by subjecting the entire population to excessive duties and equal participation in its schemes. In other words, the principles of individual responsibility, self-government, and individual sovereignty become entirely powerless in contrast with the ideology of the state.

Furthermore, a list of state provided rights is not the only clue that hints at what is truly beneath the mask of Russian statism. It has long been observed by critics of totalitarianism that "A government big enough to give you everything you need, is a government big enough to take away everything that you have".[1] The Russian state attempts to dismiss Thomas Jefferson's theory. In the opening of the 2nd chapter, the document reads: "Fundamental human rights and freedoms are inalienable and shall be enjoyed by everyone since the day of birth" (Article 17). The word "inalienable" suggests that these rights cannot be taken away and that they are guaranteed. However, nothing is further from the truth. After reading paragraph after paragraph of rights and freedoms granted by this state, the Constitution finally delivers a provision which gives away its institutional ideology. Article 55 of Chapter 2 states that the "rights and freedoms of man and citizen may be limited… to such an extent to which it is necessary for the protection of the fundamental principles of the constitutional system, morality, health, the rights and lawful interests of other people, for ensuring defense of the country and security of the State." What exactly falls into a category of protecting "fundamental principles of the constitutional system?" What exactly is included under the protection of

1. Thomas Jefferson's address to a joint session of Congress on August 12, 1794.

morality, health and the “security of the State?” If the “State” declares that free press and freedom of assembly threatens its “security,” can it not eliminate those rights? The constitution does not bother to justify the usage of these broad legal terms, thereby giving the masked statism of the Russian Federation a power to restrict nearly every right that it has previously given. This is what explains the suffering of millions of Russians whose liberties have been diminished right in front of their own eyes.

The examples that can illustrate the latter point are numerous and widespread. The police in Russia are able to stop and run a background check without any probable cause. This means that it would be absolutely normal for drivers to be pulled over and searched without any reason at all. The freedoms of political expression and speech are also commonly altered to suppress political dissent. The high profile case of Alexey Navalny, a corruption lawyer and blogger, gave the international community a glimpse of this reality. After being publicly critical of the Kremlin, Navalny was charged with numerous lawsuits and finally convicted. However, what is more interesting is the anti-corruption platform that Navalny established through the course of his career. In 2014, his anti-corruption group faced targeted police intimidation that even extended to the closest members of his family. According to *Gazeta.ru* the “press secretary of the anti-corruption group, Kira Jarmysh, stated that the interrogations began with Yulia Navalnaya, wife of the politician. She then refused to give testimony based on Article 51 of the Russian constitution. According to Jarmysh, the authorities responded by threatening Navalnaya with legal actions. Jarmysh added that ‘we think that the point of the interrogation is

to provide pressure on the group, Navalny and his family'"[2] (Dergachev, Gazeta.ru). Of course, if the Russian authorities really did believe that Navalny was threatening the security of the state, then they had every right to question, interrogate, and possibly even detain Navalny and the members of his organization. "Well now," Stated Navalny on his blog "I can officially say that among my closest relatives there is not a single one (over the age of 18) who has not been interrogated by the Main Investigation Committee of the Russian Federation" (Dergachev, Gazeta.ru).

In a legal system where these are the sufficient conditions for tyrannical suppression no one is safe. The latter example of political intolerance is further amplified by numerous laws that aim to restrict the homosexual movement in Russia. On June 29, 2013 the Russian Duma infamously passed the anti-gay propaganda law that is meant to "defend the children from information that harms their health and development" and prohibit propaganda of "non-traditional sexual values" (Russian Federation, Law №135-ФЗ). Of course, a law of this nature is legal precisely because of the aforementioned provision in the Russian Constitution; and it further demonstrates that the Russian government can do almost anything that it wants.

Another crucial element of masked statism that has remained largely intact from its original predecessor is the illusion of Federalism. Daniel R. Kempton, chair of the Department of Political Science at Northern Illinois University, in one of his works, *Russian Federalism: Continuing Myth or Political Salvation,* writes:

2. Translations from the Russian are those of the author unless otherwise noted.

> "The Soviet Union was officially a complex and multitiered federal state. Major Soviet ethnic groups were typically given their own territory, in which they lived as the privileged titular population. However, Soviet federalism was at best a myth and at worst a fraud. The federal components never had real power. In practice the Soviet Union was one of the most centralized states in history. Therefore, although Russia inherited a federal structure, it did not inherit a federal tradition. Russia's adoption of federalism should instead be conceived as a conscious effort to deal with its post-independence dilemmas" (Kempton, p. 202).

Although I wholeheartedly agree with the first part of professor Kempton's statement, the second charge is a bit bizarre and unfounded. Russia does nothing whatsoever to rebuild the principle of federalism. The trick is largely similar to that used in the Soviet Constitution of 1976. Initially, the constitution starts to recognize all of the smaller governing bodies to create a false feeling of federalism. The lengthy list of local governments appears in Article 65 and includes dozens of regions, a designated Jewish autonomous region, and cities of federal importance.[3]

Indeed, with such a long list of local self-governing bodies, Russia actually seems what its name "federation" may suggest. However, just as in the case with the total statism of the Soviet Union, it does not take long to recognize the true distribution of authority in the nation. A look inside Article 71 of Chapter 3 further illustrates the powers that are specifically given to the federal government. These include everything from the establishment of the metric system to

3. See Appendix A: Constitution of the Russian Federation; Chapter 2; Article 65.

the judicial processes, economic structure, and meteorological service.[4]

With such an extraordinarily massive federal leviathan it becomes hard to imagine how the "subjects"[5] of the Russian Federation have any remaining power whatsoever. Even professor Kempton is forced to concede this point in his own paper:

> "A cursory analysis of the constitution suggests that-despite its name-the Russian Federation remains a highly centralized state… The list of powers included in Articles 71 and 72 is so extensive that the obvious question is what meaningful powers are left for the subekty. The answer is probably very few. Federal taxation is wholly within federal jurisdiction, and the federal government even has the power to set guidelines for taxation policy at other levels" (Kempton, p. 208).

However, if there are such striking similarities between the total state of the Soviet Union and the masked state of the Russian Federation, what exactly are the differences between them? In other words, what is the evolved element of the regime?

There is no easy way of answering the latter question – after all if the evolved element was so easily identifiable, masked statism would not present a tremendous danger to society. However, after some contemplation, I think it is fair to hold that the evolved element of the virus lies in the fiction by which it spreads.

Russia started its hopeful journey toward democracy with a very positive step in the

4. See Appendix B: Constitution of the Russian Federation; Chapter 3; Article 71.

5. The word "subjects" in the Russian constitution refers to the bodies of local government and autonomous regions.

right direction. “President Boris N. Yeltsin of the Russian federated republic issued a decree today effectively banning Communist Party organizations from operating in Government offices and workplaces in the republic” – wrote The New York Times on July 21st, 1991. Yeltsin’s ban of the Communist Party even withstood the Constitutional Court which upheld its legitimacy on December 1 of 1992 (The New York Times 1992). However, then something changed. As the nation became engulfed in the sharp transformation to a market economy, many citizens who were hooked on guaranteed wages and other government programs were unable to adjust to the new ways of a market system (The New York Times 1992). Poverty became widespread and many individuals became nostalgic for the old policies of total statism. This brief moment of political nostalgia became a foundation for the return of the Communist party; and just 2 years after the ban they emerged with a new leader, Genadiy Zyuganov.

The latter historical development is the perfect illustration of how masked statism is able to use its weakness as its greatest strength. When the conditions of a society are such that the people are generally dissatisfied with the government, a true statist plays by the motto “never let a crisis go to waste.” Consequently, any economic or constitutional crisis observed in the early years of Russia’s existence as a free society was exploited and blamed on the new democratic principles. We were back at level one – the same principles which were fought against during the Perestroika are now demanded nationwide.

In a way, the masked statism of 90’s Russia acts as a direct anchor to any legitimate progress. Just as the nation attempts to fill its lungs with a deep breath of liberty it is instantly

constrained by the chains of statist totalitarianism. The people in this scenario are mere numbers – helplessly awaiting whatever procedure awaits them next.

The position of the Russian Communist Party during the recent parliamentary election further proves this point. When interviewed by a popular Russian journalist, Vladimir Pozner, Genadiy Zyuganov expressed his views on the future of Russian communism:

> Pozner: "Vladimir Nikolaevich Gorbenko asks whether or not you understand that communism and communist society are both a thing of the past. Nothing at all was built and everything in the country failed. Therefore, why keep going in this direction? After all even Christ said that if a blind man leads another blind man, they will both fall into a hole…"
>
> Zyuganov: "I want to say that Christ was the first communist of the new millennium. He fought for those in need and helped them. As far as the ideas of socialism, social justice, the people's government and humanitarianism are concerned, they remain the central core of the communist ideal. The desire to build a heavenly paradise on Earth and not just in heaven is still very attractive and will continue to pave a way for itself" (Pozner, Channel 1 Russia).

Indeed it is bizarre to see how Zyuganov believes the current problems facing Russia are to be fixed by a reestablishment of the Communist paradise. It is as if the leader of the Communist Party believes that we ought to fight fire with fire, and ignore the fact that that approach burned down the entire Soviet economy.

However, despite the fact that the masked statism of Russia conveniently feeds off the notion that modern economic problems are to be treated with approaches similar to that of

Soviet totalitarianism, it cannot hide the clearly evident benefits of the free market system – even if they are presented negatively by the government-run media. The people have an ability to read true information, think freely, and experience other societal models without a serious reprimand of the state. Under the rule of the total state, of course, such things would not even be up for consideration. Consequently, it is precisely this element of relative freedom and transparency that helps distinguish between the two types of policies advanced by the state and further illuminate the political attitudes that accompanied the birth of the Russian Federation.

Part 2 – The Modern Czar

11:59pm, New Year's Eve, 1999. Two large tables full of food were put together in the living room of our small apartment. Neatly covered with the snow white tablecloth that was reserved only for the special holidays, the tables had absolutely no room for more dishes, plates or cups. The family were all under one roof for this particular occasion – my parents, both sets of grandparents and the two great grandmothers were waiting patiently for the sound of the Kremlin bells that were broadcast live on television every New Year. Only the lonesome Christmas tree was standing tall by the corner of the room in its traditional celebratory costume. I have to admit that being the youngest one in the bunch (only about 6 years of age) I was much more anxious to open the presents after midnight, and therefore paid much closer attention to the mysterious colorful boxes under the tree than the lousy wooden

television box by the window.* However, on that particular night things turned out to be quite different, even for me.

With the twelve famous bell rings of the Kremlin clock tower coming to an end, and a collective "urraa" of nearly every family counting down with the broadcast nationwide, I quickly drank the glass of sparkling lemonade designated to me as a replacement for vodka and champagne, and hurried onward to the tree to open up my presents. Moments later, the president of Russia came on the TV to deliver his annual New Year's address. However, this time, there was something different about it. I stopped opening my presents, and came closer to the television set to listen with the rest of the family.

Sitting behind a white glass desk with a holiday tree in the background, the president was looking rather dull and pale. This was a bit strange since he was usually very lively on any television show that I happened to catch a glimpse of. Soon everything became very clear:

> "My dear friends, all my dear friends… tonight, for the last time, I am speaking to you with the New Year greeting. But that is not all. Tonight, for the last time, I am speaking to you as a president of Russia. I have made my decision. I have spent much time and effort in contemplating on it… today, on the last day of the passing century, I am going into retirement. I have heard many times that 'Eltsin will try to hold the power with all possible ways.' It's a lie. I've always said that I would not step away from the Constitution… I am leaving. I am leaving earlier than my term. Russia must go into the new millennium with new politicians… and all those who held the power in the past must step aside…

* In the Russian tradition, the presents are opened on New Year, and not on Christmas. This is most likely due to years of religious suppression by the Soviet Union which resulted in a fusion between a secular holiday and a religious custom.

> But the most important thing was done – Russia will never go back to the past, it will only go forward, and I must not interfere in this natural path of history. There is no need to be here for another half a year and hold power when Russia has someone else, someone who is strong, and with whom nearly every Russian connects their hope for the future. Why should I be in his way? Why should I wait another half a year? No… but today, I also want to say a something else; I want to apologize and ask you for forgiveness. Forgiveness for the fact that many of our dreams did not come true, for the fact that what seemed so easy turned out to be miserably painful, I want to apologize in front of those who believed that we could only take one jump from the totalitarian tyrannical past into a new civilized future. I believed in it myself… I am leaving, I did what I could… With the accordance of the Constitution, when leaving the presidential post, I have signed an order of placing the presidential duties on the Chairman of the Government, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. He shall be the head of state for the next three months until the election…" (Yeltsin, Channel 1 Russia).

After Boris Yeltsin finished his New Year's address, the screen changed for yet another broadcast, which was highly unusual. Normally, there would only be one speech every New Year; but this time there seemed to be two. A new face appeared on the television. A young man with a delicate voice and a strict face began to give his presidential address to the public. His name was Vladimir Putin.

***

One could write volumes about Vladimir Putin and his lengthy reign over the Russian Federation. From the beginnings as a KGB officer to becoming the person of the year in *Time* –

Putin's life and career is full of interesting stories, facts, and surprises. However, as exciting as those things are, I have deliberately decided to keep this portion of the thesis limited to the most immediate political questions that help unravel the nature of the modern Russian Federation, and its ongoing evolution. However, even here Vladimir Putin's contribution may well be worth an entire book.

Being appointed to the presidency of the Russian Federation after less than a year as Prime Minister must undoubtedly have been quite overwhelming. The unsettled public suffering from the incomplete reforms, the corrupted heads of political institutions, the rapidly declining population, and the trapped transitional economy were all staring straight into Putin's eyes from his first day at the Kremlin. The broader question – what can be done about Russia's desire for a complete democratic transition – was perhaps the definitive issue that could solve Russia's ideological struggle and the reluctance to let go of the old ways. What did the great Putin do in response to all these pressing issues? Well, to put it rather kindly, he did very little for the country but very much for himself.

Of course, the supporters of Putin's regime will be quick to point out all the positive improvements the country has seen over the past decade – and rightfully so. After all, even many of those who do not like Vladimir Putin cannot argue much against the plain economic statistics, about the increased individual income, consumer power, and national competitiveness with foreign markets. However, the question of statism and its evolution from a total stage to a masked stage is not answered by economic statistics or data analysis. If only

things were that simple. The problem is that the truth that reveals the nature of oppressive governments often hides amidst the most obscure and secluded shadows of history, thereby becoming totally invisible to charts and tables of statistical evidence. It hides where numbers cannot be, and exposes itself when numbers can no longer prevent the catastrophe. It is for this reason that a statistical approach through an economic analysis must never replace philosophic discourse and historical inquiry.

Indeed, the charts and numbers that record Putin's rule do look very promising.[6] Statistically speaking, the economic development of Russia after transitioning from a socialist model to capitalism was going quite well. Therefore, what could possibly be wrong with the new Russian regime?

There are a number of questionable events that took place during Vladimir Putin's first presidency; however, perhaps the most notable of them all did not come until its very end in 2008. Suspicion among the Russian citizens and international political observers all pointed to one single question – will Vladimir Putin stay for a third term? To many, the question was a fair one based on the dictatorial nature of Russian leaders in its history. However, there was a dilemma – the Russian Constitution was in the way. Indeed, nothing in the constitution allowed Putin to stay for more than two terms, and wide speculations of Putin's probable push for its amendment, or even its total dismissal, became the routine talk among the ordinary Russians. But then, in a surprising move for everyone, Putin decided to take the position of a

6. See Appendix C

constitutionalist. When asked about the matter by the press he firmly held the position that he would step down after the two term presidency. Surprising indeed; but Putin had a plan – a plan that would even make Yeltsin's dismissal of the parliament in 1993 seem like a stroll on Red Square amidst a peaceful Sunday afternoon.

The plan consisted of roughly three parts. The first part was simple – appoint a successor. Of course, nothing was ever going to be as honest as having an influence-free election with a new president emerging out of other political parties, no. The key was to maintain full political control on the situation – both in the legislature and the executive. That's when the world first heard of Dmitry Medvedev. Prior to the election, Putin appointed Medvedev Prime Minister. Then Medvedev announced that he was running for president and received a powerful endorsement from Putin. Consequently, Medvedev won the election and became the next president of the Russian Federation. Notice, however, that in the context of political power nothing at all changed: the majority of local seats were filled with the members of the United Russia Party, which Putin had created; in the Duma, the party also maintained an immense 315 out of 450 seats; and the new President Medvedev was also, quite conveniently, one of the leading faces of United Russia. The only one small difference was the fact that Vladimir Putin was no longer in the picture. Or was he? Here is when Putin surprised us all for the second time. Right as the presidency looked secure, Putin decided to become Russia's Prime Minister; or in other words, simply trade places with Medvedev, who dutifully appointed him to the post. This second part of the move was rather unprecedented; and although many have suspected that Putin would be the main figure behind Medvedev, they did not expect

Putin to be so arrogantly bold and upfront about the matter. It was as if he was making no attempt whatsoever to even partially hide his influence in the hierarchy of Russia's political elite. This move, in turn, created another important effect – it maintained Putin's influence as the leader of the party. Rather than leaving the public scene entirely for several years, Putin was not about to let go of the ability to make daily appearances on state television. The plan worked brilliantly; as a matter of fact the state-run media even began to love Putin more for upholding the constitutional limitation on presidential terms. Putin quickly became a political hero, widely praised in nearly every news report on any major television station. In some areas, the TV coverage of Putin's daily activities actually increased after he stepped down from the presidency. The viewers would often find themselves listening to one news report about Medvedev followed by six different reports about Putin: Putin flying a jet, Putin taking care of injured animals, Putin talking to the average Ivan working at a factory, and so on. However, this was not the end of it. Putin decided to go for the killer strike in his third and final master move.

When looking back at Boris Yeltsin's political career, Putin saw his most egregious mistake: Yeltsin disobeyed the constitution before amending it. Obviously, this created a problem: if the popularity ratings are not high enough to secure firm support of all federal departments behind the president in an up-for-grabs constitutional crisis, then the whole situation becomes a large gamble. What if the army decided to back the parliament instead of the president in the coup of 1993? What if the majority of the population decided that Yeltsin's move was an insult to the new constitutional government? In practice, there is no possible way to know the outcome of events until it may well be too late to contain the resulting chaos. For

Putin, the gamble for power was not on the agenda, and he decided to correct Yeltsin's risky move with a much safer yet equally effective alternative. Instead of amending the constitution after exceeding its limits, Putin decided to amend it first so that the authority of his czarship would be legally justified from the very beginning. Consequently, right after the switch between Putin and Medvedev, the Constitution of the Russian Federation was amended to allow for two consecutive presidential terms of six years each, as opposed to two four year terms previously. Conveniently enough, this did not apply to the current president Medvedev, who decided not to participate in reelection at the end of his first four year term. The rest is history. With a heavy landslide victory, Vladimir Putin demolished his opponents in the 2012 presidential election to secure six more years of constitutional dictatorship…

Part 3: No One Left to Vote For

The old doorbell lazily screeched its report, alarming those in the kitchen that my grandmother was coming back with groceries. The year was 2004, and the crippled Russian economy had finally begun to recover from its wild romance with the lawlessness of the '90s. Stability, more or less, became the norm for most families who no longer struggled to obtain food and other basic necessities. It was election eve, and the conversations that evening revolved around the topic of voting. At the time I was still not hugely interested in political philosophy; however, the questions of Russian politics appeared to me as rather unique. "Grandfather" – I remember asking that evening – "what do you know about Putin's United

Russia party?" I looked up to my grandfather as a role model, an expert in politics and government. At nearly every family gathering he dominated the conversation with his unique insight and stories from his naval adventures. Without saying anything and with a slight smirk on his face, my grandfather proceeded to reach for his pocket and take out his wallet. From the inside of the wallet, he carefully took out a shiny business card that said "*United Russia*" with my grandfather's picture and a title "*founding member.*" I could not explain to you the surprise that I felt upon the discovery of my grandfather's fundamental involvement with Putin's political party. I felt proud, even honored to be a part of the family that played such a huge role in Russian political development.

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You may be surprised to know that I am still proud of my grandfather, even though I quickly realized that his political views entirely conflicted with mine. Nevertheless, there is a good reason as to why I bring up the subject of political parties in the Russian political system. For most non-Russians, the question of "are the Russian elections rigged" becomes a popular discussion topic. Ever since I came to America, I was asked this question on almost a weekly basis. I have consequently given it enough thought to answer in the following way: yes, Russian elections are rigged, but not in the way in which you may think and not to the degree to which you may speculate.

Undoubtedly, there are regions where the statistical data and eyewitness accounts clearly indicate a fabrication of votes. Such is often the case with the small remote regions of

the country where over 107% of the population ends up voting for Vladimir Putin.[7] However, these instances are often meaningless when it comes to the scope of influence in the nationwide vote and can also be explained by other factors. For example, due to their low marginal influence, violations in such regions can be done just as easily by the local governments themselves, simply seeking to receive extra funding or demonstrate their outstanding loyalty to the regime. Indeed it would make little sense for United Russia Party to fabricate votes in such meaningless regions, while thus endangering the international validity of the entire election process. This is about the most irrational thing any large-scale election fabricator could concoct.

However, this is not to say that election fraud consisting of fake votes and ballot fixing doesn't happen. To the contrary, there are probably a number of ways by which the regime fixes elections in a more subtle and illusive manner. Nevertheless, the main corruption in elections actually happens well before their start, and the stories of unreal voter turnouts often distract international observers from discovering the deeper truth.

The corruption in Russian elections can be best described by the concept of *political enframing.* By this term I mean simply that the political stage in Russia is enframed in such a way where the voter is given no choice but to choose the regime every time. The parties that stand for small, fiscally responsible government, constitutional reform, and federalism are not allowed to register or participate in elections. Widespread claims of unsurpassable bureaucratic

7. In the 2012 election, it was reported that Putin received around 107% voter turnout in the region of Chechnya. http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/03/06/10592169-107-percent-turnout-another-side-to-russias-vote

barricades for registration of new parties are direct evidence to the fact that Kremlin controls who enters and leaves the political arena. The primary opposition newspaper, *Kasparov.ru* reports about this form of election fraud in Saint Petersburg: "the election of 2014 has already developed its own know-how: not allowing leaders of the opposition and various activist groups to file the documents for registration as official candidates in municipal districts […] There were a number of documented instances where government officials simply barricaded the door, and where in other municipalities the outcasts were forced to communicate only through the intercom. Almost unanimously, the 'outcast' candidates spoke of local government attempts of lengthening the primary stage of the election so that they would run out of time for registration" (Kasparov.ru). Similar observations about the Russian political system can be heard from all the sides of the ideological spectrum. When writing about the role of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Marxist theoretician Boris Kagarlitsky observed: "It is enough to recall that within the Communist movement itself, Zyuganov's party was at first neither the sole organization, nor the largest. Bit by bit, however, all other Communist organizations were forced out of political life. This occurred not because the organizations in question were weak, but because it was the CPRF that had received the Kremlin's official approval as the sole recognized opposition"[8] (Kagarlitsky, Greenleft.org).

As of the 2011 Duma election, 4 parties occupied the Russian parliament: Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Just Russia, and the United

8. Translated by the publication *Greenleft.org*.

Russia. Now ask yourself the following question – what options does a rational voter have in this political arena? Do you vote for the Communist Party that still wants a return of many Soviet policies? Do you vote for the Just Russia party that believes in modern and international socialism? Do you vote for the Liberal Democratic Party, the leader of which is an infamous demagogue who believes that America is constantly testing chemical weapons on the Russians? When the political stage is *enframed* in this manner, even the most rational voter is forced to choose Putin's United Russia, which (very conveniently, I might add) sits right in the middle of the political scale and tries to avoid radical positions.

The latter strategy of political *enframing* is a brilliant tool of election fraud based on a number of reasons. First, it is a perfectly illusive method of engineering a political stage from the ground up. Since political parties are the prime vehicles for reform, controlling the access to competition is the most efficient way to regulate where reform comes from. Furthermore, shutting down small parties by intentionally complicating registration rules is nearly impossible to detect. Finally, a small political party or an organization seeking to become a political party does not have large PR capabilities, and any injustice committed against such a group is likely to go unnoticed by the mainstream media. In short, Vladimir Putin crushes the eggs of political competition before they get a chance to hatch – perhaps the most effective way of retaining authoritarian power. The latter strategy even inspired a joke that is now commonly known to most Russians: *Stalin's ghost appears to Putin in a dream, and Putin asks for his help running the country. Stalin says, "Round up and shoot all the democrats, and then paint the inside of the Kremlin blue." "Why blue?" Putin asks. "Ha!" says Stalin. "I knew you wouldn't ask me about the*

first part."

Truth be told – I love Russia; but not with the usual, loyal type of love that a countryman feels for his or her homeland. No, the feeling is more complex, more nuanced. I love Russia like a child would love an alcoholic parent – with a bitter memory of things which cannot be forgotten, and a fantastic hope for things which only live in dreams. It would be idealistic for me to say that Russia can recover and become a democracy. I would be naïve to propose one step – as Yeltsin was forced to admit before me – of change that can eradicate the country from all aspects of the totalitarian. However, believe it or not I still dream of walking the streets of Saint Petersburg as a truly free citizen of a truly free nation.

The task that faces the Russian people is of monumental proportions. As a matter of fact, I would even go as far as to conclude that the masked statism of the modern Russian system is significantly more complex than that of its predecessor. During the Soviet era, the solution to communist rule was as clear as it can be – capitalism. It is true that expressing pro-capitalist opinions may have been significantly more dangerous in contrast with the current Russian political environment. I would neither deny the fact that an ordinary Russian is objectively much better off in almost every category of economic and political wellbeing. However, as positive as that sounds, the latter also plays into the hands of the state. The odds of civil unrest and regime change are much greater in a society that starves its own people, and sends them to Siberia by the millions. Under total statism, there are many more truths to conceal, many more facts to erase, and many more citizens to brainwash. In contrast, the

evolved masked state easily maintains its powerful control while only having to do half the work.

On the outside, the Russian Federation is a democracy; on the inside, it is but a continuation of an old Soviet state. Everything promised to nearly one hundred and fifty million people is a fiction. In this state, as is in the total state of the USSR, the entire population endeavors and labors in order to give support to the programs which are labeled as "inalienable," yet designed as removable. Therefore, no simple solution can be provided for unraveling the dilemma facing this country. However, one thing is certain: if a vehicle is built with mismatching parts and incompatible details, no repair will restore it to a working model; the structure needs to be rebuilt, and remodeled entirely from the ground up. Only this can save a nation tangled in contradicting principles, and give it a new hope for a more prosperous future.

Appendix A.

Constitution of the Russian Federation; Chapter 2; Article 65;

http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-03.htm

"The Russian Federation includes the following subjects of the Russian Federation: Republic of Adygeya, Republic of Altai, Republic of Bashkortostan, Republic of Buryatia, Republic of Daghestan, Republic of Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, Republic of Kalmykia, Karachayevo-Circassian Republic, Republic of Karelia, Komi Republic, Republic of Mari El, Republic of Mordovia, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Republic of North Ossetia - Alania, Republic of Tatarstan, Republic of Tuva, Udmurtian Republic, Republic of Khakassia, Chechen Republic, Chuvash Republic Altai Territory, Trans-Baikal Territory, Kamchatka Territory, Krasnodar Territory, Krasnoyarsk Territory, Perm Territory, Primorye Territory, Stavropol Territory, Khabarovsk Territory;

Amur Region, Arkhangelsk Region, Astrakhan Region, Belgorod Region, Bryansk Region, Chelyabinsk Region, Ivanovo Region, Irkutsk Region, Kaliningrad Region, Kaluga Region, Kemerovo Region, Kirov Region, Kostroma Region, Kurgan Region, Kursk Region, Leningrad Region, Lipetsk Region, Magadan Region, Moscow Region, Murmansk Region, Nizhny Novgorod Region, Novgorod Region, Novosibirsk Region, Omsk Region, Orenburg Region, Orel Region, Penza Region, Pskov Region, Rostov Region, Ryazan Region, Samara Region, Saratov Region, Sakhalin Region, Sverdlovsk Region, Smolensk Region, Tambov Region, Tomsk Region, Tver Region, Tula Region, Tyumen Region, Ulyanovsk Region, Vladimir Region, Volgograd Region, Vologda Region, Voronezh Region, Yaroslavl Region;

Moscow, St. Petersburg - cities of federal importance;

Jewish Autonomous Region;

Nenets Autonomous Area, Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area - Yugra, Chukotka Autonomous

Area, Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area."

Appendix B

Constitution of the Russian Federation; Chapter 3; Article 71;
http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-03.htm

a. *adoption and amending of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and federal laws, control over their observance;*

b. *federal structure and the territory of the Russian Federation;*

c. *regulation and protection of the rights and freedoms of man and citizen; citizenship in the Russian Federation, regulation and protection of the rights of national minorities;*

d. *establishment of the system of federal bodies of legislative, executive and judicial authority, the rules of their organization and activities, formation of federal bodies of state authority;*

e. *federal state property and its management;*

f. *establishment of the principles of federal policy and federal programmes in the sphere of state, economic, ecological, social, cultural and national development of the Russian Federation;*

g. *establishment of legal groups for a single market; financial, currency, credit, and customs regulation, money issue, the principles of pricing policy; federal economic services, including federal banks;*

h. *federal budget, federal taxes and dues, federal funds of regional development;*

i. *federal power systems, nuclear power-engineering, fission materials, federal transport, railways, information and communication, outer space activities;*

j. *foreign policy and international relations of the Russian Federation, international treaties and agreements of the Russian Federation, issues of war and peace;*

k. *foreign economic relations of the Russian Federation;*

l. *defense and security; military production; determination of rules of selling and purchasing weapons, ammunition, military equipment and other military property; production of poisonous substances, narcotic substances and rules of their use;*

m. *determination of the status and protection of the state border, territorial sea, air space, exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of the expenditures;*

n. *judicial system, procurator's office, criminal, criminal procedure and criminal-executive legislation, amnesty and pardoning , civil, civil procedure and arbitration procedure*

legislation, legal regulation of intellectual property;

o. *federal law of conflict of laws;*

p. *meteorological service, standards, metric system, horometry accounting, geodesy and cartography, names of geographical units, official statistics and accounting;*

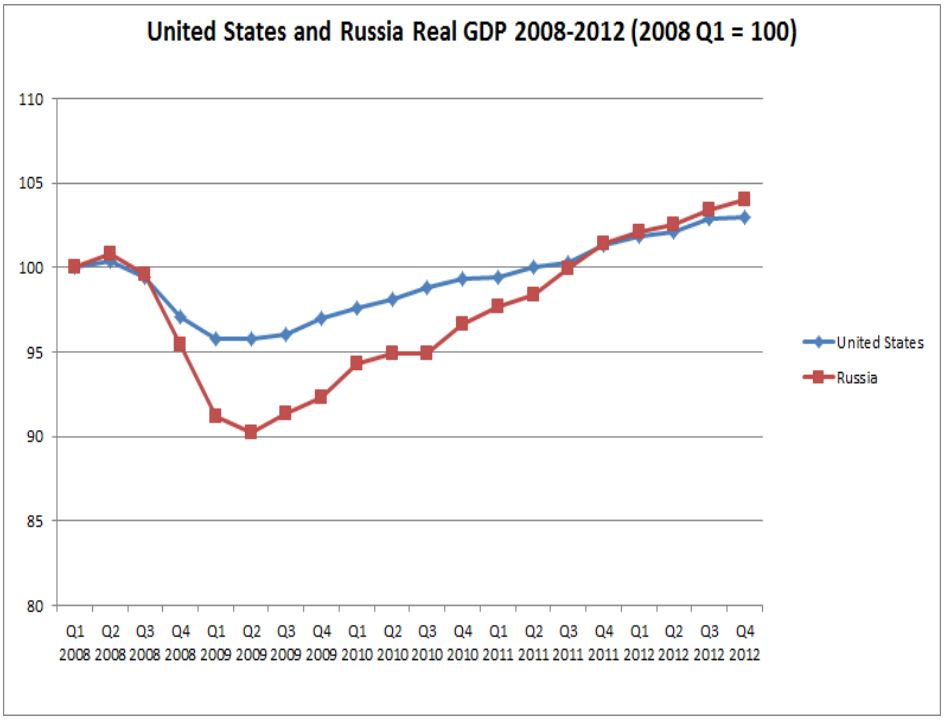
q. *state awards and honorary titles of the Russian Federation;*

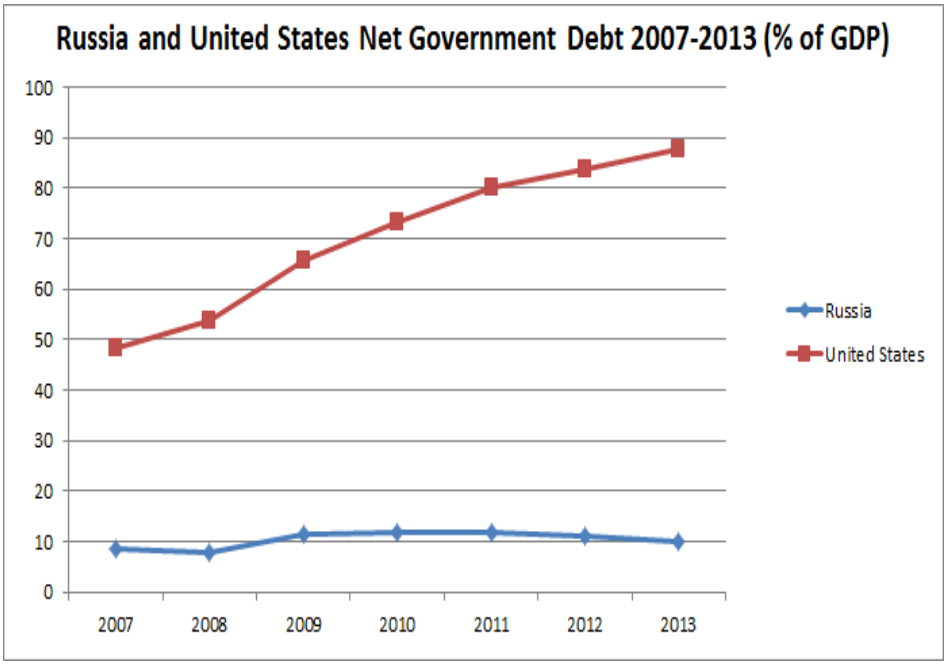
r. *federal state service.*

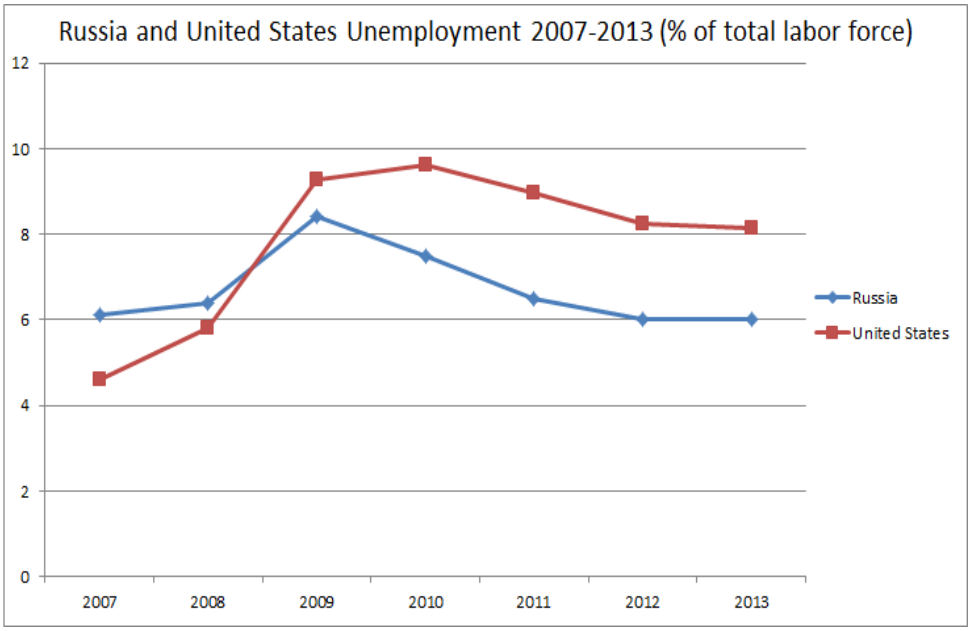
Appendix C

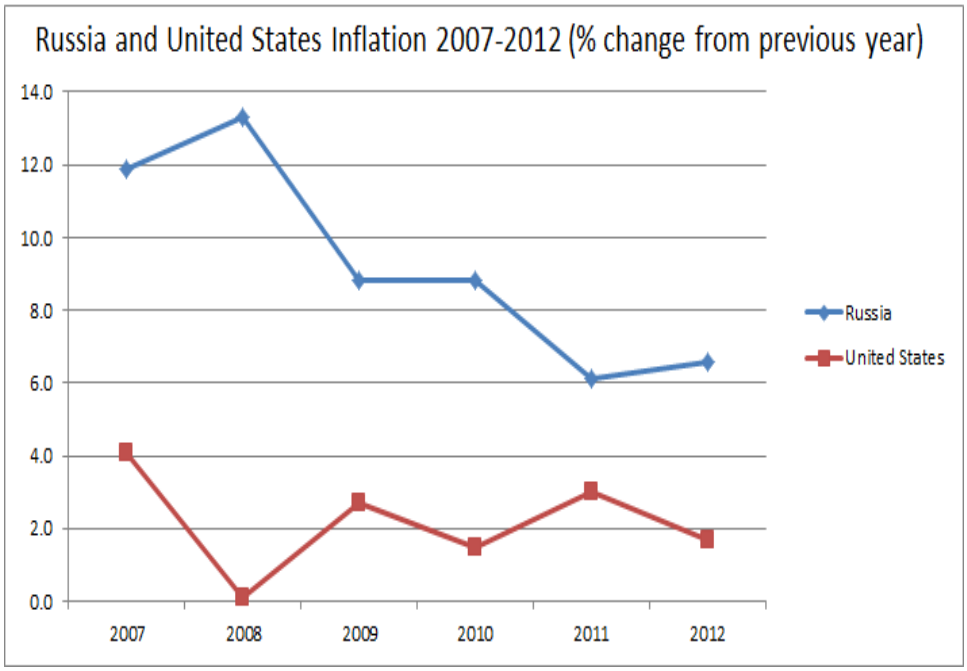
Russian Economic Development

From the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Rosstat. www.forbes.com






Russia and United States Unemployment 2007-2013 (% of total labor force)
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
2013
Russia
United States


Russia and United States Inflation 2007-2012 (% change from previous year)
14.0
12.0
10.0
8.0
6.0
4.0
2.0
0.0
2007
2008
2009
2010
2011
2012
Russia
United States

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