

PUTIN CAN'T GO ON FOREVER, CAN HE? HOW RUSSIAN LEADERS OBTAIN, RETAIN, AND LOSE POWER

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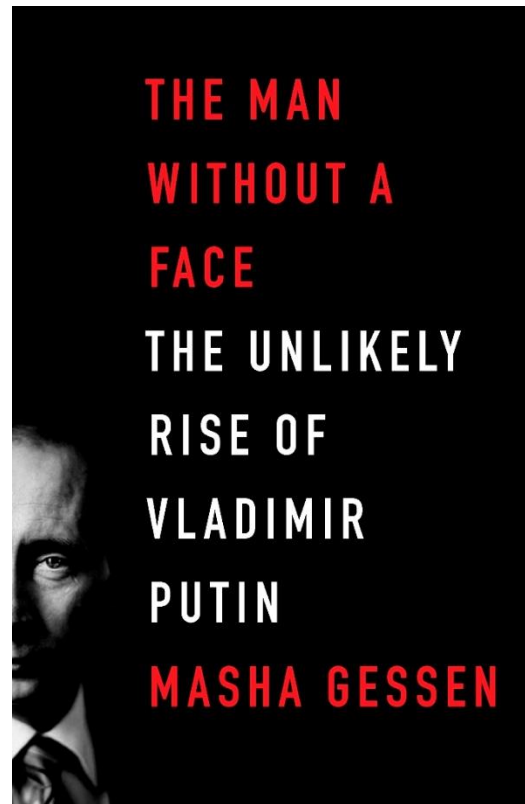
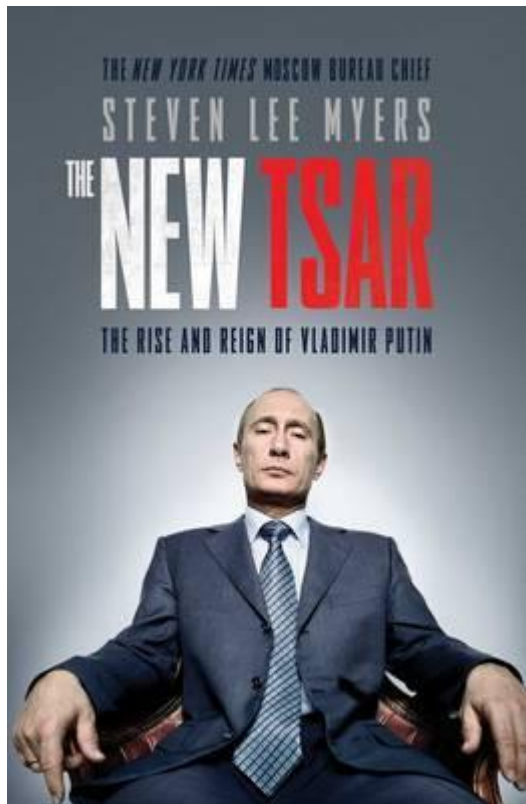
SMA Discussion – October 11, 2018



THE PRACTICE OF POWER IN RUSSIA

- How is power practiced in Russia?
 - Two competing visions
 - The Iron Tsar (Richard Pipes)
 - The Adjudicator-in-Chief (Edward Keenan)
- How does a Russian leader lose power?

THE IRON TSAR



CONSEQUENCES OF THE IRON TSAR → RUSSIAN BEAR



THE ADJUDICATOR-IN-CHIEF



THE ADJUDICATOR-IN-CHIEF

- The debates at the very top are unclear
- Most important for leader and members of top elite is to maintain closed system and stability of cadres
- Power at the top anarchic, but bureaucracy highly hierarchic
- Series of battling hierarchies

- When leader makes subordinates think that a) life without him is worse than life with him, and b) that the future looks like the present, then he can continue indefinitely

“IRON TSARS” GET POWER, BUT “ADJUDICATORS” HOLD ON TO POWER

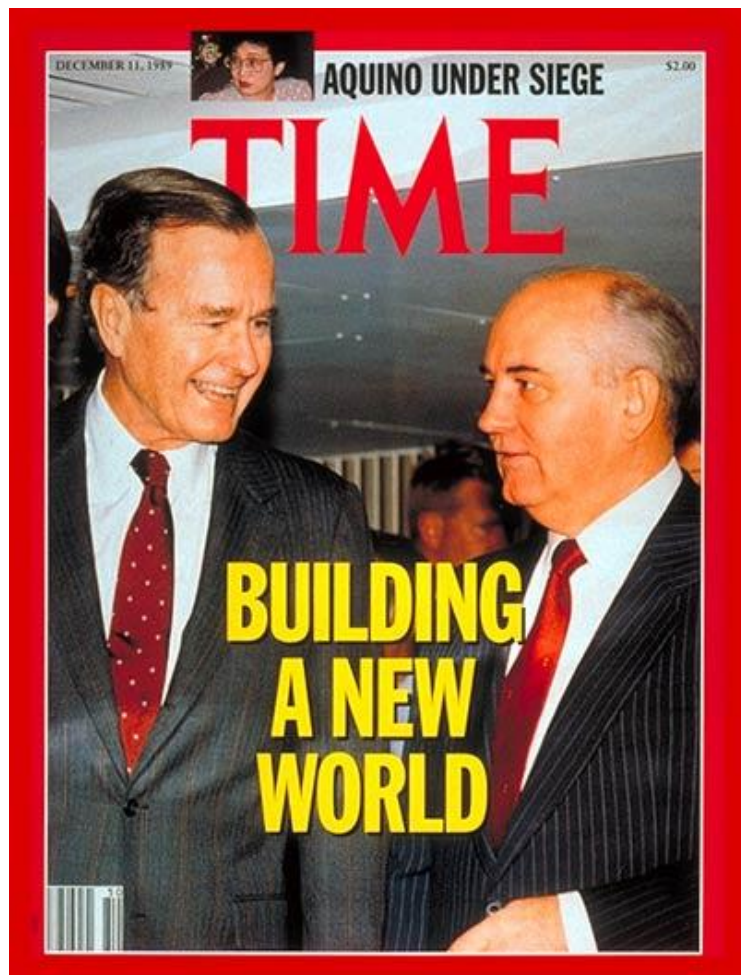


- Yeltsin defended parliament (“the people”) in August 1991, but October 1993 was shelling that same building
- Ruled by decree and US/Western support

SOURCES OF PUTIN'S POWER

- Internal
 - Took a tough line against Chechens (first war was Chechen victory, second was installation of pro-Moscow government)
 - Took a tough line against the oligarchs to the extent that repressing Mikhail Khodorkovsky encouraged all others to flee country or fall in line
 - Oil boom meant that the pie increased for all, including resolving the pension and wage arrears that defined 1990s
 - Eliminated formal and informal political opposition (federal envoys to eliminate local laws at variance with federal laws; cancelling gubernatorial elections; broke opposition parties and turned them into “systemic opposition”)
 - Revived security services funding and prestige

PUTIN'S 1989 VS. 1991 MOTIVATION



- Malta, December 1989
- Gorbachev had envisioned some sort of post-Cold War duopoly between USA and USSR and Bush was willing to support Gorbachev so long as USSR didn't go back on retrenchment and could help maintain international and European stability

PUTIN'S 1989 VS. 1991 MOTIVATION

- Instead of post-Cold War world, Russia lives in post-Soviet world
- NATO expansion demonstrates that Russia can't stop it, can't protect nominal allies, can't stop NATO from out-of-area operations, can't enforce sovereignty claims, and fundamentally isn't of equal status to US or other great powers



SOURCES OF PUTIN'S POWER

- He's willing to revise the international order to make the world look more like 1989 than 1991
- Various strategies:
 - Bandwagoning (following 9/11/2001)
 - Balancing (run-up to Iraq War)
 - Revision (following Munich 2007 speech): Georgia, Ukraine/Crimea, Syria, meddling, poisonings, etc.
- All of them demonstrate that he's willing to take action to return Russia to the top
 - Doesn't care about soft power
 - Credibility problem

“CRIMEA IS OURS”

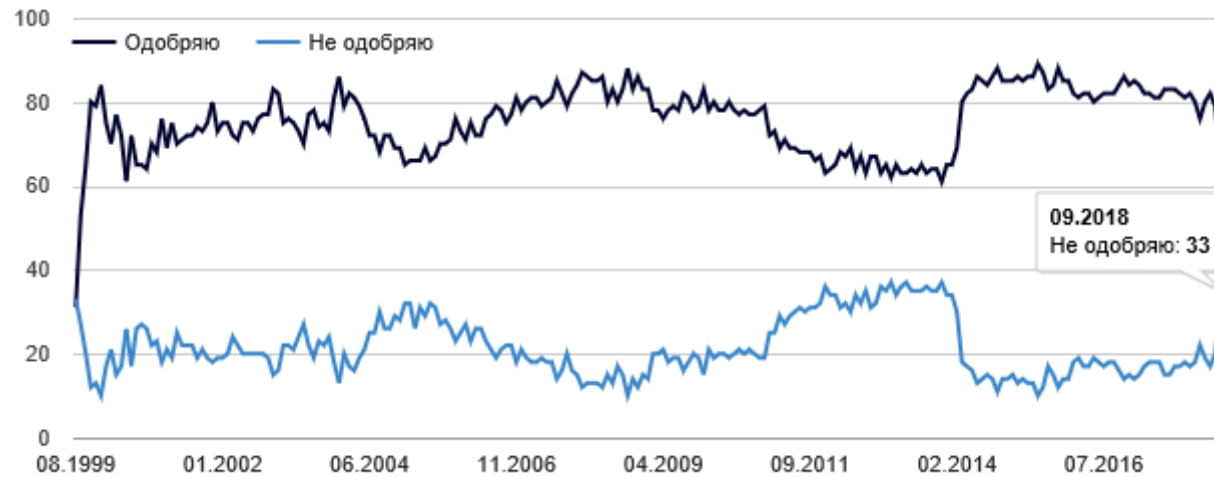


HOW DOES HE LOSE POWER?

- All leaders rely upon “selectorates” – the individuals or groups central to their rule
 - Putin’s is those who rely on the big state: security services, state employees, ethnic minorities outside of big cities, the poor and elderly
- Problems:
 - War fatigue
 - Pie is shrinking but corruption isn’t
 - Sanctions forcing government and business to make very difficult decisions
 - Embarrassment over image of Russians abroad
 - Pension reform plans went over horribly

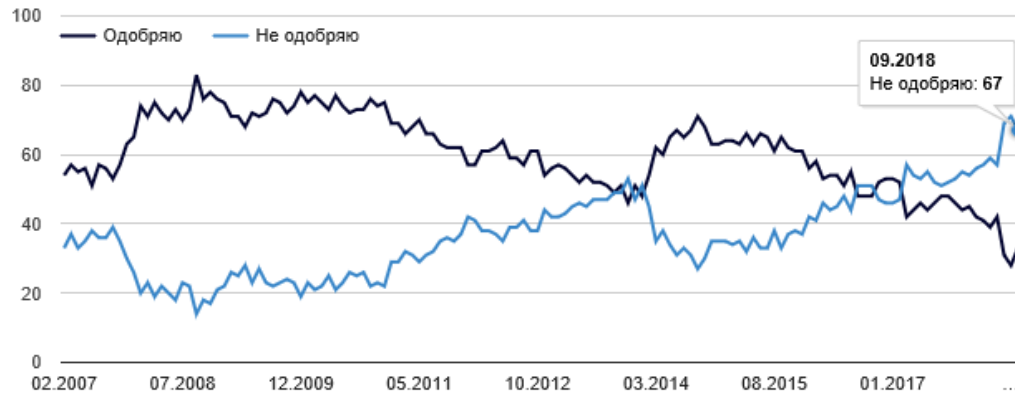
HOW DOES HE LOSE POWER? PUTIN APPROVAL RATINGS

ОДОБРЕНИЕ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ВЛАДИМИРА ПУТИНА

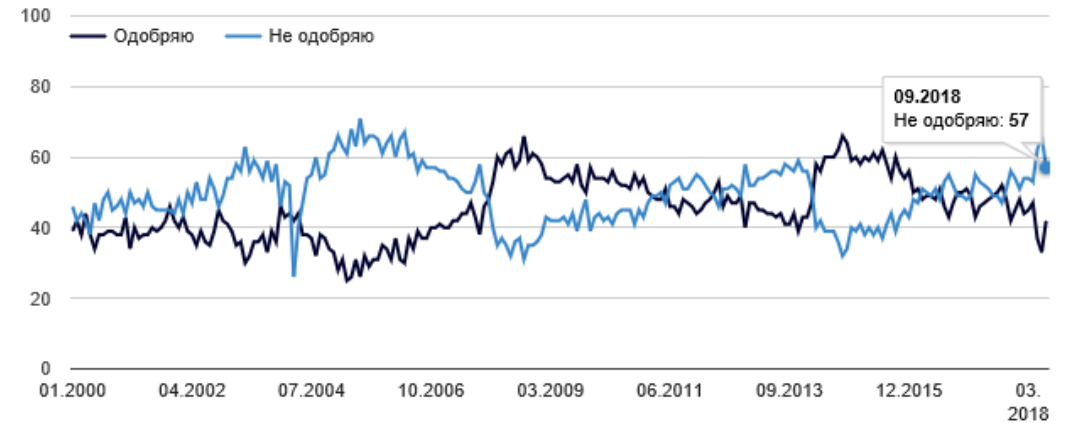


HOW DOES HE LOSE POWER? MEDVEDEV AND GOVERNMENT APPROVAL RATINGS

ОДОБРЕНИЕ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ДМИТРИЯ МЕДВЕДЕВА



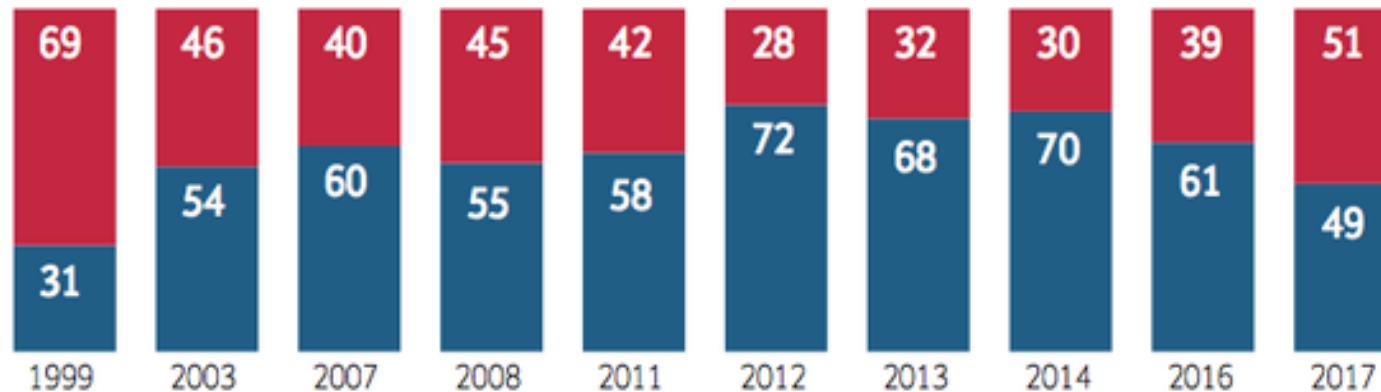
ОДОБРЕНИЕ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВА РОССИИ



DO YOU BELIEVE THAT RUSSIA NEEDS SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES, OR DOES IT NEED STABILITY?

Перемены или стабильность:
чего хотят россияне

% ■ страна нуждается в существенных переменах ■ страна нуждается в стабильности



ИСТОЧНИК: ИНСТИТУТ СОЦИОЛОГИИ РАН

HOW DOES HE LOSE POWER?

- When leader makes subordinates think that a) life without him is worse than life with him, and b) that the future looks like the present, then he can continue indefinitely
 - Can he protect security services from the West?
 - Can he makes people's lives demonstrably better in terms of consumption?
 - Can he continue to make people think sanctions are unpleasant but not a big deal?
 - Can he continue to make people believe that great power status is worth foreign wars?
- **Putin loses power when people stop believing that he'll be there forever; when he goes, it will be very fast**
- **Who comes next?**

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN THE MEANTIME?

- Collapse of Ukraine – if it survives as democratic and wealthy European country, then what does that say about Russia? A successful Ukraine means that the post-1991 world and not the post-1989 world has won
- Challenge the US everywhere possible (Ukraine, Syria, in the US itself) – concentrate on high impact, low cost tactics
- Make sure there's enough reform so that the people and the West see the contours of change and get excited, but not so much that Putin loses his key domestic power: controlling access to economic opportunity

THANK YOU!

- Questions?
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