

# Russian Siloviki

**Journal Issue****Author(s):**

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**Publication date:**

2018-09-12

**Permanent link:**

<https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000289654>

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**Originally published in:**

Russian Analytical Digest (RAD) 223



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## The Power of the *Siloviki*: Do Russia's Security Services Control Putin, or Does He Control Them?

By Michael Rochlitz (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)

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### Abstract

Since 2012, the politics of the Russian government have shifted towards a visible tightening of the screws at home, and an increasingly aggressive stance abroad. At first glance, it seems that these developments are the result of the security and defense structures, the so-called *siloviki*, having finally gained the upper hand in the struggle between rival factions at the top of Russian politics. However, rather than the *siloviki* imposing their control over Russian politics, it is Vladimir Putin's interpretation of how the world works that has become increasingly similar to the worldview of the *siloviki*, thus explaining the authoritarian turn in Russian politics in recent years.

### Introduction

Is Russia a state controlled by its security services? Conventional wisdom has it that Russia's so-called "force ministries"—i.e. those state agencies with the authority to use armed force to respond to threats to national security—have become the dominant players in Russian politics in recent years. *Sila* in Russian means force, and in the view of many observers it is the "siloviki", the members of the force ministries, who have shaped Russian domestic and foreign policy since Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in March 2012.

This view is corroborated by Russia's increasingly oppressive policies at home, as well as the country's growing reliance on force abroad. From early 2012 until today, Russian civil society has been subjected to a number of crackdowns that seem to stem directly from the playbook of the security services. The annexation of Crimea, the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's intervention in Syria also seem in line with a worldview resembling that of the hardliners in the military and the security services. Nevertheless, the question remains who ultimately pulls the strings and decides upon major policies in contemporary Russia. Are the *siloviki* controlling Putin? Or is Putin handling the *siloviki*, and balancing their power with that of other influential factions?

### Internal Turf Wars

On the surface, it seems that Putin controls the *siloviki*. Rather than a unified group able to coordinate its actions to push for specific policies, the *siloviki* are composed of a number of rival ministries, agencies and factions that are deeply divided by personal and business rivalries. These factions are headed by close associates of Putin from the 1990s and early 2000s, leaving the Russian president as the one person who might be able to balance them to ensure that no single faction becomes too powerful.

It is not in the primary interest of each *siloviki* faction to influence the political direction of the country.

Instead, they care about preserving the status quo, which has permitted them to accumulate significant fortunes in the past. Through the presence of top-level *siloviki* at or near the head of Gazprom and Rosneft, the state-owned gas and oil companies, they control an important share of Russia's natural resource income. The security services are also involved in all kinds of protection, extortion and corporate raiding schemes. These activities range from protection rackets run by lower level policemen, through the involvement in corporate raiding attacks by mid-level security officials, to top-level *siloviki* expropriating whole companies from business rivals. While the predatory behavior by Russia's security services continues to have a strong negative effect on Russia's investment climate and the Russian economy, many observers argue that it is the possibility to distribute rent-seeking opportunities among rival factions that makes it possible for Putin to keep these factions under control.

When it comes to the control of rent-seeking opportunities, the various *siloviki* groups also compete fiercely amongst themselves, to ensure that no agency encroaches on the turf of a rival faction. While these internal "siloviki wars" mostly remain hidden from the public, sometimes the struggle emerges into the open. In one example the head of the Federal Drug Control Service, Viktor Cherkesov, complained in 2007 about *siloviki* infighting in an open letter in the newspaper *Kommersant*, after his agency came under severe attack from the Federal Security Service (FSB). In another example in 2014, the deputy head of the Interior Ministry's anticorruption department committed suicide by jumping from a 6<sup>th</sup> floor balcony, while being investigated and held in custody by the FSB, in a case highlighting the fierce rivalry between the FSB and the Interior Ministry.

The intense infighting among rival *siloviki* factions makes it unlikely that they are able to pursue a common agenda to influence the country's policies. But the

extent to which Putin is able to control the various siloviki factions also remains questionable. Every now and then, Putin's frustration with the excessive rent-seeking behavior by the country's law enforcement agencies becomes visible, such as during his annual address to the Federal Assembly in December 2015. In his speech, Putin complained that from the 200,000 cases that had been opened by the investigative authorities against Russian businessmen in 2014, only 15 percent ended with a conviction. At the same time, however, 83 percent of the investigated entrepreneurs had fully or partially lost their business as a consequence of being investigated, according to the visibly frustrated Russian President.

### The Tail Wagging the Dog?

Putin's preference for managing conflicts behind the scenes also hinders his ability to effectively control and balance the competing siloviki factions against each other. At different times the various factions, and in particular the FSB have been exploiting this weakness by confronting Putin with a *fait accompli*, that would necessitate a highly visible intervention by the president to be changed post-factum. The conflict between the Federal Drug Control Service headed by Viktor Cherkesov and the FSB in 2007 is one such example. Although Putin had initially asked his long-time ally Cherkesov to look into some shady dealings by the FSB, the FSB just kept raising the stakes, up to a point where Putin could do nothing but sacrifice Cherkesov if he wanted to avoid a potentially destabilizing public scandal. Another more recent example is the conflict around the oil company Bashneft. Here Igor Sechin, head of the state-owned oil company Rosneft and often described as the leader of one of the most important siloviki factions, had cast an eye on the oil company of Vladimir Yevtushenkov, a businessman who had always remained staunchly loyal to Putin. Although Sechin had already accumulated power so vast that he seemed to distort the system, he was finally able to get control over Bashneft as well. The Bashneft case put into doubt Putin's ability to use the allocation of rent-seeking opportunities to keep a balance among rival siloviki factions. In the event, it looked once again as if Putin was driven by developments he was not fully able to control.

In sum, while the siloviki are unable to jointly control Putin in any coordinated way, Putin's ability to restrict the predatory behavior by the country's various security agencies also remains limited. This, however, leaves the question who ultimately pulls the strings of Russian politics. Here, in a more subtle way than what one might expect when looking only at power relations and the ability to impose control, the siloviki have indeed become increasingly influential in recent years.

### The Siloviki Worldview: Enemies Everywhere

While they are divided by their respective economic interests, the siloviki remain united and distinct as a faction by a common view of the world. This worldview can be summarized in a few main points. Most importantly, the siloviki are in favor of a strong and centralized state that is supported by a well-financed and extensive security and defense apparatus. In their view, such a strong state is necessary as Russia is under threat by external forces, who try to undermine the Russian state both from within and from abroad, envying its natural resources and status as a great power. Fighting this external threat necessitates a realist approach to politics that only the siloviki fully understand, which makes them uniquely qualified to lead Russia in these uncertain times. In their view of both domestic and foreign politics, as well as Western and international political institutions, the siloviki are characterized by a high degree of cynicism, with a belief that politics is primarily a game of lies and deception. This disillusionment with the political decision-making processes has its roots in the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, the ensuing decade of political and economic chaos that Russia went through during the 1990s, as well as what the siloviki see as a constant lack of respect towards Russia from the West. As a result, the siloviki worldview has started to contain an element of schizophrenia that makes their predatory behavior inside Russia compatible with a genuine belief that all threats to the country are external.

Although Putin is himself a product of Russia's security services, during his early years in office his worldview differed on several points from that of the siloviki. The economic collapse of the Soviet Union had taught him that competitive markets are far superior to state intervention, resulting in a number of pro-market reforms at the beginning of his time as Russian president. Similarly, Putin genuinely tried to engage the international community during the early 2000s, with a focus on cooperation rather than confrontation. At the time, both the group of economic liberals and the siloviki in the government had about equal influence on Putin and on Russian politics.

All this changed from the late 2000s onwards, first slowly, and then markedly with the start of Putin's third presidency in 2012. Since then, Putin's worldview has become similar to that of the siloviki, in particular with respect to his increasingly cynical view of Western political norms and institutions. It is in this way that the siloviki have decisively, if indirectly, gained control over Russian policymaking. A number of factors were responsible for this change in Putin's view of the world.

Perhaps the most important factor was that the West failed to take Putin's offers of cooperation seriously. Time and again, Russia was treated as a junior partner, rather than as the global power Putin believed was Russia's due. This perceived lack of respect coincided with a number of regime changes in former Communist countries, the so called-color revolutions, with Russia-friendly governments being toppled in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, often with support from the West. In 2008 and 2009, the economic crisis added an element of acute vulnerability to external shocks. The Arab spring in 2011 and the loss of power by then-presidents Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt further contributed to the growing uncertainty amongst Russia's elites. When political protests after the 2011 Duma elections started to look like the beginning of a color revolution on the territory of Russia itself, Putin reacted by decisively turning towards a strategy favoring political control over economic and political liberalism.

As a consequence, the liberal wing of the Russian government lost most of its influence after 2012. While the long-term finance minister Alexei Kudrin had already left the government in September 2011 in a fight with then-president Medvedev, most of the liberal team around Medvedev was sidelined shortly after Putin's return to the Kremlin, with the most notable example being the sacking of defense minister Anatoliy Serdyukov in November 2012. At the same time, a small group of key siloviki around Putin became the informal nexus of political power. Notable members of this group included Sergey Shoigu, who succeeded Serdyukov as minister of defense, Sergey Ivanov, who headed the presidential administration until 2016, the head of the Security Council Nikolay Patrushev, the head of Rosneft Igor Sechin, FSB director Alexander Bortnikov, Viktor Zolotov, who headed the president's security service until 2014 and now heads the National Guard, Alexander Bastrykin, head of the Investigative

Committee, and Evgeny Murov, who directed the Federal Protective Service until 2016. The concentration of political power within a small group of people from the security services signified a significant narrowing of potential sources of information used by Putin. Not a friend of the internet or of reading newspapers, Putin mainly relies on briefings by his close associates for information. As most of his close advisors are now siloviki, few voices remain that can provide the president with an alternative point of view.

More recently, Putin has even fallen out with some of his old associates from the siloviki. During the last two years, a number of siloviki heavyweights, such as Sergey Ivanov or Evgeny Murov, were replaced by younger technocrats, who lack the experience and long-term personal relationship with Putin to be able to criticize and contradict the president. Some of Russia's more reckless undertakings in recent years, such as the intervention in the U.S. presidential election in 2016, the hunting down of spies who defected abroad, as well as an increasing willingness to use military force might be due to a new generation of middle-aged technocrats, who lack the ability to exercise a moderating influence on the president.

## Conclusion

To conclude, Russia's shift since 2012 towards more repressive methods at home and a more assertive stance abroad is not the result of siloviki lobbying, or even the influence of a number of top-level siloviki. More likely is that Putin's interpretation of how the world works has become increasingly similar to the worldview of the siloviki, and that as a consequence he is increasingly relying on the force ministries to implement policy. Putin's frustration with the constant infighting and the predatory behavior of Russia's security services show that he is almost certainly aware of the cost that a heavy reliance on the siloviki imposes on the country. But this seems to be the price he is prepared to pay to keep political control.

### *About the Author*

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## The Shadow State and Crime

By V.A. Nomokonov (Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok) and V.V. Filippov (Far Eastern Branch of the All-Russian State University of Justice, Khabarovsk)

DOI: [10.3929/ethz-b-000289654](https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000289654)

### Abstract

In the many works examining criminal elements of the political sphere, the role of the shadow state remains understudied. The shadow state exists in parallel to the formal system of state management. Shadow state components include: the political system; the norms and practices of the legal system; the use of force; and the apparatus for implementing shadow laws.

### Recognizing the Shadow State

Today we observe a well-known paradox: official crime statistics show a decline in Russia over the last several years. But this decline is taking place where there are increased international tensions, the continuation of local and regional military conflicts and terrorist acts. Moreover, the country is increasingly polarized between a small group of immeasurably rich individuals and the vast majority, who are poor. Additionally, the Russian economy is experiencing difficulty, corruption is continuing to corrode the political system, and extremism is appearing in society. Even taking into account the lag between the social challenges and problems and the resulting crime, the best explanation of what is happening in our society is the disappearance of many social phenomena, including crime, into the shadow. Official statistics increasingly do not reflect the criminal reality. Crime is not only becoming virtual thanks to the use of high technology, but it is increasingly concealed.

A significant, if not determining, role in the hiding of crime and other social phenomena is a hidden shadow force growing in the bosom of the state. This hidden force is not a legal alternative to the current authorities like the “shadow cabinet” in the UK. In Russia, the shadow government is undoubtedly a negative, criminogenic factor. The problem of the shadow state currently is that it has been insufficiently researched in comparison to the phenomenon of the shadow economy or even “shadow law.” All these phenomena have in common their unofficial status—that is they are not recorded in state statistics or other forms of accounting. It is as if they do not even exist. The influence of the shadow political authorities on society demands urgent attention. Unfortunately, the problem of the shadow state is beyond the purview of even the most prominent authors who research the criminal aspects of politics.

### Shadow Law

The first scholar to undertake research on “shadow law” was the famous legal theoretician V.M. Baranov. He defined “shadow law” as:

“...a dangerous aberration of negative unofficial law in continual conflict with official law. It is accompanied by asocial dictates, defined by the very participants of social relations, which regulate all forms of illegal activity and create a shadow legal order that is protected by special moral, psychological and physical sanctions.”

The academic community supported this idea in general with the exception that it did not want to call the shadow regulator a “law”. However, the name is not important, since the essence of shadow regulation, its special danger, is to keep spreading. Shadow law is the antipode to the official (state) system of legal regulation. Shadow law not only does not fit with the legal life of a society, it actively opposes it, destroying it with its anti-social nature. It is shadowy because it is unofficial, unannounced, but invisibly acting as an authoritative leader calling to action specific layers and groups in society.

In other words, it is the notorious “understanding (*poniatiiia*)” which guides the actions of criminal actors in their daily activities. Despite the controversial nature of this idea, it was developed by the well-known political scientist V. Pastukhov in his article “Constitution of Understandings” (Pastukhov 2012).

Experts have noted that shadow institutions from the economy have “put down roots” in the political and legal systems. Moreover, today they are fulfilling a system-forming role in terms of connecting the economy with politics and the law. Bureaucrats use their workplace, authority, and the information at their fingertips as resources for carrying out their unofficial “entrepreneurship.” The official legal system has basically become decorative. Now it is frequently used only to punish those who violate shadow norms or hinder influential criminal groups from achieving their “shadow” economic, political, and other goals (Kosals and Ryvkina, 2002).

Taking into account the famous thesis that law is nothing without a way to enforce it, “shadow law” is administered by some shadow force whose role should be researched. If positive law is enforced by the activ-

ities of a legitimate state, then shadow law is realized by a hidden state, a shadow authority.

### Shadow Power

Shadow power is defined by political scientists as a “stable accumulation of informal (illegal) procedures and institutions, which through corrupt relations and types of activity, are expressed in the establishment of parallel centers of power. It significantly influences the adoption of key political and state decisions, works behind closed doors, and is spread among members of the shadow elite and their supporters within the criminal world. Shadow political power is characterized by technologies which work their way into the official state bureaucracy and squeeze out official norms, substantially harming the state and political order (Zarandiia 2002).” This kind of power is the so-called shadow state.

According to political scientists, all political epochs without exception used two basic types of political management: open (transparent) and closed (shadow, or in the most extreme forms, secret). In the former, the goals are established and implemented openly. In the latter, they are camouflaged, masked, and kept quiet. The concrete relationship between these two methods of realizing power depends on numerous factors. But, above all, it is the degree of coincidence (or non-coincidence) of interests among those who manage and those who are managed. In the shadow sphere, politics turns into the means for achieving corrupt benefits in exchange for money, material goods, and personal comfort (Tsyganov 2007).

Many processes in contemporary Russia, unfortunately, are carried out not in a civilized, open manner, but under the “covers” in shadow structures using shadowy means. The extent of the shadow world today is completely unprecedented in both the final days of the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia. The economic interests of a small minority within Russian society take precedence over the interests of society and are guaranteed by government policy (Vorotnikov, 2004).

### The Shadow State

The literature has a growing set of sources describing the formation and activity of the shadow state in Russia. In the absence of a normal state structure, the Russian political elites created a system of parallel power structures—the shadow state—the basic characteristic of which is splicing together corrupt channels between ruling government sector elites and private sector elites. The result blocks the development of normal political institutions, slows the process of production, and prevents the majority of the population from engaging in

legal economic activity and participating in the political process. The main goal of this elite is not social development, but their own well being and securing immediate financial gain (Shaklenia, 2002).

Today the enormous growth of the shadow (criminal) component of society is not so much the result of political omissions or shortcomings, but the outcome of planning and conscious efforts in the shadow political sphere. Formal institutions, such as the presidential administration, government, ministries, governors and mayors, now participate in informal processes. These structures work not on the official level, but on the informal personal level with expressed corporatist goals. The distinctive feature of the Russian political environment is that informal relations are significantly more powerful than formal ties (Pliais, 2001).

V. Lapkin notes the same tendencies: “In contemporary Russia the formal and informal (legitimate and shadow) levels of the political system have been flipped with the result that the informal level is now the main and decisive one. The informal level is where the main political players make agreements regarding their main interests; this is where the most socially important decisions are prepared and decided upon. In these conditions, state decisions are debated and made in secret, which is one of the reasons why there is no faith in the authorities (Lapkin, 1999).

Shadow politics is directly connected to corruption and should be seen as an important criminogenic factor. Official structures, such as the police, prosecutors, and judges, often participate in shadow justice. These shadow forces have created a network of their own structures that have administrative and even purely juridical functions. Another component of shadow justice is the use and purchase of the mechanisms of official justice. An increasing number of law enforcement officers have begun to link up with shadow economy networks, and the use of “roofs (*krysha*)” and the legal and power capabilities of official justice in the interests of “paying customers (*zakazchik*)” has become a distinctive feature of law enforcement practice.

The structure of the “collective oligarchy,” the new ruling class, has become much more complex today than it was in the 1990s. Today it includes the old (tamed) oligarchs; new oligarchs; powerful bureaucrats, particularly high level officers among the *siloviki* who have begun to directly subordinate business to themselves; numerous anonymous advisors serving the bureaucracy; and the part of the “thieves world” elite that has sworn allegiance to the supreme authorities. The significance of this criminal class has actually increased in comparison with the notorious 1990s (Pasyukhov 2012).

The shadow state's budget process copies the techniques used in filling the "thieves common budget (*obshchak*)." Revenues include a percent from various sources of income connected in some way with official business. These include, for example, payments for the sale of civil service positions; commissions for winning state procurement orders; contracts and other profitable deals with state agencies; income from the activities of state corporations, which are forced to confidentially contribute part of their profits derived from projects not directly connected with their official functions; deductions from illegal operations carried out under the supervision of law enforcement agencies, particularly actions that transform virtual money listed in state accounts into cash and then laundering and transferring it abroad, actions which cannot be carried out without the complicity of the very agencies that are supposed to monitor and prevent such transfers; and illegal tax refunds (Pastyukhov 2012).

### The Shadow State and the Mafia State

What is the relationship between the shadow state and the more commonly discussed Mafia (or crime) state (Ovchinskii. 2016)?

A.I. Dolgov lists the following steps in the development of the criminal segment of society. During the first stage (1970s to the end of the 1980s), there was an escalating grabbing of property and other means of illegal personal enrichment during the period of the so-called "stagnation." During the second step (end of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s), there were ever larger efforts focused on illegal personal wealth accumulation and the redistribution of property. Political measures were taken to legalize and protect criminal capital. Bureaucrats working in state agencies began to use their offices in the interests of shadow and criminal businesses. At this stage, the system of shadow justice began to emerge, as well as a variety of other spheres in which society entered the shadows. During the third stage (from the early to late 1990s), there was a criminalization of the state. Along with the expansion of the shadow economy to the global level, a corresponding shadow policy arose. By the end of the 1990s, the main political, economic, social, and other processes in the country began to flow under the control of organized crime (Dolgova 2003).

The mafia state is the final stage in the development of the shadow state. Key elements include the shadow authorities, shadow policies, shadow law, shadow justice, shadow economy, and shadow ideology. In terms of scale, such a state could be the so-called "world government," illegal, pseudo-state formations such as ISIS, national state, or regional structures. The main domes-

tic shadow authorities are corrupt civil servants and politicians, informal societies ("families," "friends," or "courtyards") and/or criminals.

Thus, today we see the presence in Russia of the key elements of a shadow state: there are real shadow authorities and their legal mechanisms, shadow law with its norms and practices and enforcement mechanisms, and agencies for implementing shadow laws. There are qualified personnel with experience and connections to the law enforcement agencies and other official institutions. The sum of all these existing and inter-connected shadow juridical elements and their unified efforts for supplying and defending shadow interests makes it possible to speak of a fully formed shadow state within the official state (Smirnov 2003).

### The Origins of the Shadow State

What are the specific conditions leading to the formation of the shadow state? Briefly, in our view, it is the result of the profound impoverishment of society, where instead of social solidarity, cohesion, and harmony, there is social stratification, a split between rich and poor, the fed and the hungry, the masters and the serfs. The state should harmonize the interests of the individual, society, and the state. When the authorities cannot do this, there arises a demand for the violent satisfaction of private and public interests. And if absolute power corrupts absolutely, then shadow power is doubly dangerous since it exists outside of the official system and there is no way to hold it accountable.

The negative social and criminal processes in such countries are developing according to one scenario and have a single logic. First, power in the country belongs to big business. Second, the official authorities are only a façade for this shadow power and carry out its will. Third, the population is viewed simply as a source for forming wealth, which satisfies the aspirations of shadow business. The population is a renewable resource, like wood, fish, or similar products. Fourth, in order to keep the population ignorant and in the form of a stupid, mooing herd, the shadow authorities use a variety of technologies oriented towards meaningless or false goals, such as focusing attention on sporting achievements (How many goals did the soccer star score? Who won in curling? etc.), clogging information channels with pointless information (different talk shows, the intimate details of celebrity lifestyles, endless soap operas), and the various speeches of politicians and officials claiming that everything is done to promote the interests of citizens. Fifth, legislatures function as an appendage of the executive branch. Sixth, legislation is focused on ensuring the financial success of the shadow players. Seventh, the system periodically finds "enemies" and focuses the



population on them in order to deflect attention from significant problems and inconvenient questions. The authorities are always able to blame economic and social problems on the intrigues of the enemy.

The shadow state is the result of social pathology. This social pathology appears in two basic forms: social parasitism (some individuals living at the expense of others) and violence (extremism, aggression, intimidation, and destruction). A society founded on the base

of realizing fundamental principles of Freedom, Justice, Solidarity and Equality cannot accept violence, parasitism, and exploitation and therefore has no need for the total lie and the exit of its authorities into the shadow. There is strength in the truth. Accordingly, in conditions where there is transparency among the authorities, political procedures, the economy, and a justice system that society can monitor, there is no place for a shadow state.

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## Putin's Symbiotic Relationship with the Siloviki

Review of Peter Reddaway, *Russia's Domestic Security Wars: Putin's Use of Divide and Rule Against His Hardline Allies*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

By Robert W. Orttung (George Washington University)

DOI: [10.3929/ethz-b-000289654](https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000289654)

### Abstract

Peter Reddaway's book explains how Putin stays in power by relying on the siloviki. The president has created divisions among two main groups in Russia's key security and law enforcement agencies and makes himself indispensable by playing them off against each other. While Putin is able to remain in power, these battles have terrible consequences for Russia since they undermine the legitimacy of the government, rule of law, and the country's ability to create an effective economy. The system is increasingly untenable and change potentially can come from increased power for the military and the rising protest movement organized by Alexei Navalny.

### Who Rules Russia and How?

Peter Reddaway's latest book provides a powerful indictment of the dysfunctional Putin regime that has governed Russia for nearly 20 years. The book provides answers to explain how Putin has managed to stay in power for so long and what the main source of power in Russia is today. It answers these big questions by exploring the details of seemingly obscure battles among the people who wield violence in Russian society—the president, security police, regular police, and organized crime.

I worked with Peter during the early 2000s, when Putin had just come to power and was beginning to assert this authority. As a relatively young scholar, I learned a lot from him. He had devoted his career to studying human rights in Russia and amassed a huge archive on the Soviet dissidents. He also produced a big picture book about how power worked under President Boris Yeltsin entitled *The Tragedy of Russia's Reform: Market Bolshevism versus Democracy* (with Dmitri Glinski).

Peter and I traveled around Russia and examined the nature of the country's federal system. There was some expectation that the then 89 governors, who were at that time directly elected by their constituents in a concession made by Yeltsin in the mid-1990s, would stand up to the Kremlin as Putin worked to centralize power. Many at that time assumed that the governors would seek to preserve their own autonomy to work in favor of local interests, however corrupt, rather than those of far-off Moscow. In fact, the governors quickly folded to the revived central Russian state.

A big part of the ability of the Putin Kremlin's ability to exert power throughout Russia's regions came from the *siloviki* and their ability to collect *kompromat* on local officials in order to hold them in check. Putin's

goal was not to reduce the amount of corruption, but to exert his power over all possible opponents in the system. Partly he neutralized the governors by dividing the country into seven federal districts, allowing the secret police to monitor the governors and keep them in check. We published our findings in a two-volume set entitled *The Dynamics of Russia's Politics: Putin's Reform of Federal Regional Relations*.

Although Putin carried out some serious reforms in the first years of his rule, Peter's latest book describes the period of conflict among the siloviki from 2004 through 2010. The analysis draws heavily on a wide variety of Russian sources. One of the most prominent is the work of the late Vladimir Pribylovsky, who headed the Panorama think tank in Moscow and published the comprehensive Labyrinth database of Russian politics. I relied heavily on this material and found it to be one of the best and most detailed sources available.

### Divide and Rule

The central argument of the book is that Putin and the siloviki effectively rule Russia, set policies and divide up the wealth with little input from other groups. During the crucial years of Putin's second term, when he was thinking about how best to extend his ability to stay in power beyond the constitutional two terms, he purposely used divide and rule tactics to split the siloviki into two groups so that he could serve as the balancer between them. Putin would alternatively favor one group or the other in order to maintain balance and ensure that he was the indispensable leader who was needed to ensure that the system continued to function. Key oligarchs were part of these groups and they all had an interest in Putin's continuing to stay in power so that they would continue to have access to Russia's wealth. As

Peter points out, Putin sought to maintain autonomy from the siloviki, but this was never an easy job and that sometimes in periods of crisis the president's grip on power would slip.

A key argument of the book is that Putin's desire to maintain his own safety and position comes at a great cost to Russia's law enforcement system and economic development. Fomenting administrative battles among the groups who control the country's violence and its most lucrative industries necessarily prevents it from developing in a coherent way. Under Putin, the wealthy class takes more of Russia's wealth and there is more corruption than there was during the Yeltsin years.

While Putin and his team introduced some key reforms during their first years in office, they have since become a parasite group living off of Russia. Peter compares their modus operandi to that of the Italian mafia, though arguing that Putin and his cronies are worse for Russia because the Italian mafia never sought to rule the country the way Putin and his group rule Russia. According to the rules of the system, the essence of the Putin clan is personal loyalties, acknowledgement of Putin as leader, a steady focus on material self-enrichment, manipulation of the political and economic system, intimidation of outsiders who gain some political or economic power, and the use of violence when the clan's will is thwarted (pp. 5–6).

During many years, the book describes a close relationship between powerful actors within Russia's law enforcement agencies and the Tambov organized crime group in St. Petersburg that was headed by Vladimir Kumarin. For many years he enjoyed close relations with the Cherkesov-Zolotov group, one of the two Peter describes, but was arrested in 2007 and eventually sentenced to prison. Kumarin was able to operate for many years with impunity by paying off the authorities who should have prosecuted him.

### Balancing Among Two Groups

The central part of the book traces the battles between the Cherkesov-Zolotov group and the Sechin group. Viktor Cherkesov, an early associate of Putin and once head of the KGB in Leningrad, ran the state drug-control agency from 2003–2008. He allied with Viktor Zolotov, a former businessman who eventually became head of Putin's Presidential Security Service in 2000. This group was in near constant battle with Igor Sechin, head of Rosneft, and his allies. The Sechin group was smaller and more secretive than its rival.

Cherkesov was famous in Russia for taking the unprecedented step of describing the inner battles among the siloviki in a couple of newspaper articles that appeared

in 2004 and 2007. Most likely Cherkesov decided to air the clan's dirty laundry when he no longer had Putin's support, although the relationship between these men during these periods is not entirely clear. Putin essentially fired Cherkesov not long after his second article appeared, making Cherkesov the first of the president's friends to be driven from the inner circle (p. 99). The more hard-line Sechin has emerged in a stronger position and now has extensive control over Russia's lucrative oil sector. The war between the two factions that Putin promoted and set against each other was most intense in 2003–4 and 2006–7. According to the book's analysis, "Together with lesser conflicts of similar type, the silovik war and Putin's role constitute the essence of the political-economic system" in Russia (p. 35). Putin, the "oligarch-in-chief," plays the factions off against each other to gain the autonomy he needs, Peter argues. In this way Putin makes himself essential to the "workings of the whole oligarchy (p. 36)."

At the end of 2007, as the end of his second term approached, Putin had to decide how to solve Russia's succession problem. He ultimately concluded that he had to remain in power to prevent the Sechin group from becoming too powerful (p. 78). In this case, he followed the advice of Roman Abramovich and the oligarchs that were aligned with him. It is not entirely clear how Abramovich was able to thwart Sechin because little has been published about the meetings between Abramovich and Putin.

### What Next?

Putin depends on the elite siloviki groups to stay in power. However, they are undermining the legitimacy of his regime with their disrespect for the rule of law and unrestrained desire to grab Russia's wealth. The system is rotting from within, according to this analysis.

Despite the dysfunction of the system described in great detail in these pages, Peter sees the main threats to its on-going existence coming from other sources. One is the increasing power of the military, which does not figure in the previous discussion. Putin's reliance on the wars in Ukraine and Syria to distract popular attention from Russia's accelerating economic problems give the armed forces considerably more prominence and sway. The fact that Putin has had to raise the pension age in the summer of 2018 indicates the economic distress of the regime which is forced to take such an unpopular step. Another growing problem is the opposition leader Alexay Navalny, who has been gaining strength after the murder of Boris Nemtsov. Navalny's team has been able to assemble detailed information on regime corruption. The authorities frequently jail Navalny for a few weeks at a time, but so far have been afraid to give him a longer

sentence. And, the unreformed economy is becoming a bigger drag on Russia.

Overall, the book provides a compelling argument about how Putin has been able to remain in office for nearly two decades. He relies heavily on the power of the

siloviki to repress other forces in society while balancing different factions of this clan against each other. The system is hurting Russia's development and is increasingly unstable. Like many others, this book suggests that change is coming, but it is not clear when.

#### *About the Author*

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#### *Recommended Reading*

- Peter Reddaway, *Russia's Domestic Security Wars: Putin's Use of Divide and Rule Against His Hardline Allies*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Elisabeth Schimpfoss, *Rich Russians: From Oligarchs to Bourgeoisie*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2018.

## ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

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Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

Layout: Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann, Michael Clemens

ISSN 1863-0421 © 2018 by Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich

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