

## **Vladimir Putin: “The world's most popular leader”?**

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On Sunday, Russians will vote in their country's parliamentary elections. The results are a foregone conclusion. Putin's party, United Russia, is expected to win in a landslide. The only question is whether the margin of victory will exceed 70%. If it does, then Putin will continue to be the most powerful player in Russian politics even after he steps down from office next year.



***Vladimir Putin***

Vladimir Putin is arguably the most popular leader in Russian history, although you'd never know it by reading the western media. According to a recent survey conducted by the Wall Street Journal, Putin's personal approval rating in November 2007 was 85% making him the most popular head of state in the world today. Putin's popularity derives from many factors. He is personally clever and charismatic. He is fiercely nationalistic and has worked tirelessly to improve the lives of ordinary Russians and restore the country to its former greatness. He has raised over 20 million Russians out of grinding poverty, improved education, health care and the pension system, (partially) nationalized critical industries, lowered unemployment, increased manufacturing and exports, invigorated Russian markets, strengthened the ruble, raised the overall standard of living, reduced government corruption, jailed or exiled the venal oligarchs, and amassed capital reserves of \$450 billion.

If there's a downside to Putin's legacy, it's hard to see.

Russia is no longer “up for grabs” like it was after the fall of the Soviet Union. Putin put an end to all of that. He reasserted control over the country's vast resources and he's using them to improve the lives of his own people. This is a real departure from the 1990s, when the drunken Yeltsin steered Russia into economic disaster by following Washington's neoliberal edicts and by selling Russia's Crown Jewels to the vulturous oligarchs. Putin put Russia's house back in order; stabilized the ruble, strengthened economic/military alliances in the region, and removed the corporate gangsters who had stolen Russia's national assets for pennies on the dollar. The oligarchs are now all either in jail or have fled the country. Russia is no longer “for sale”.

Russia is, once again, a major world power and a force to be reckoned with. Its star is steadily rising just as America's has begun to wane. This may explain why Putin is despised by the West. Freud might call it "petroleum envy", but it's deeper than that. Putin has charted a course for social change that conflicts with basic tenets of organized greed, which are the principles which govern US foreign policy. He is not a member of the corporate-banking brotherhood which believes the wealth of the world should be divided among themselves regardless of the suffering or destruction it may cause. Putin's primary focus is Russia; Russia's welfare, Russia's sovereignty and Russia's place in the world. He is not a globalist.

That is why the Bush administration has encircled Russia with military bases, toppled neighboring regimes with its comical "color-coded" revolutions, (which were organized by US NGOs and intelligence services) intervened in Russian elections, and (threatened) to deploy a nuclear weapons system in Eastern Europe. Russia is seen as a potential rival to US imperial ambitions and must be contained or destroyed.

In the early years of his presidency, it was believed that Putin would comply with western demands and accept a subordinate role in the US-EU-Israel centric system. But it hasn't worked out that way. Putin has wisely resisted integration and consistently defended Russian independence.

The triumphalism which swept through Washington after the fall of the Berlin Wall has been replaced with a palpable fear that Russia's power will continue to grow as oil prices increase. The tectonic plates of geopolitical power are shifting eastward. That's why the US has joined in "The Great Game" and is trying to put down roots in Eurasia. Still, it's easy to imagine a scenario in which America's access to the last great oil and natural gas reserves on the planet--the three trillion barrels of oil and natural gas located in the Caspian Basin---could be completely blocked by a resurgent Russian superpower.

The most powerful of the Washington think tanks, the Council on Foreign relations, recognized this problem early on and decided that US policy towards Russia had to be reworked entirely.

John Edwards and Jack Kemp were appointed to lead a CFR task force which concocted the basic pretext for an all-out assault on 'the Putin.' This is where the idea that Putin is "rolling back democracy" began. In their article "Russia's Wrong Direction", Edwards and Kemp state that a "strategic partnership" with Russia is no longer possible. They note that the government has become increasingly "authoritarian" and that the society is growing less "open and pluralistic".

*Kemp and Edwards provided the ideological foundation upon which the entire public relations campaign against Putin has been built. And it is quite an impressive campaign. A Google News search shows roughly 1,400 articles from the various news services on Putin. Virtually all of them contain exactly the same rhetoric, the same buzzwords, the same spurious claims, the same slanders. It is impossible to find even one article out of 1,400 that diverges the slightest bit from the talking points which originated at the Council on foreign Relations.*

*Readers should check this out for themselves. Its interesting to see to what extent the media is nothing more than a propaganda bullhorn for the national security state. Putin's personal approval ratings already confirm his enormous popularity, (85%) but the media continues to treat him like he's a tyrant. It is completely incongruous. [Editorial emphasis]*

In most articles, Putin is disparaged as "anti democratic"; a charge that is never leveled at the Saudi Royal family even though women are forbidden to drive, they must be fully-covered at all times, and can be stoned to death if they are found to be unfaithful. Also, in Saudi Arabia, beheading is still the

punishment of choice for capital crimes.

When Saudi King Abdullah visits the US, he is not heaped with scorn for his regimes' repressive treatment of his people. Instead he's rewarded with flattering photos of he and George Bush strolling arm-n-arm through the Crawford sage.

Why is Putin blasted for "rolling back democracy" when American stooge, Mikhail Saakashvili, arbitrarily declares martial law and deploys his truncheon wielding Robo-cops to beat protesters senseless before dragging them off to the Georgia gulag? The pictures of Saakashvili's bloody crackdown appeared in the foreign press, but not in the US where the media had all its camera lenses focused on Garry Kasparov (contributing editor to the Wall Street Journal and right-wing loony) as he was led off to the Moscow hoosegow in handcuffs for protesting without a permit.

Poor, abused Garry.

What American wouldn't prefer a leader who stuck up their national interests rather than the interests of global Capital? Has Putin repealed habeas corpus, due process and the presumption of innocence? Has Putin abducted innocent suspects from the streets of foreign capitals and taken them to black sites where they've been tortured, water-boarded and sometimes killed? Has Putin initiated war's of aggression on defenseless countries killing and maiming a million or so civilians on "a pack of lies"? Has Putin created 4 million refugees and a humanitarian crisis which is likely to erupt into a region-wide conflagration?

Those aren't Vladimir Putin's Daisy Cutters and cluster bombs falling on Samara, Falluja and Tal Afar. That isn't Putin's armada in the Gulf off the coast of Iran. Those aren't Putin's intelligence agents and mercenaries executing covert operations in Mogadishu, Beirut and Islamabad.

Putin's crime is that he rejects Washington's "unipolar" world model. As he said in Munich:

"The unipolar world refers to a world in which there is one master, one sovereign; one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. At the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within this system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within.... What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization."

He added:

"We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law....We are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force - military force - in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts. I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security."

Well said, Vladimir. Good luck in the election.

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article18817.htm>

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Cleaves Alternative News. <http://cleaves.lingama.net/news/story-812.html>