

“Vladimir Putin, A Life”
Lecture #3: Putin as President, 2000-2008:
Internal Policy

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, UC Berkeley

Spring 2024

Instructor: George Breslauer

- **How characterize the grown-up Putin, circa 1999/2000?**
- **Russian imperialist?**
- **Aggrieved statesman?**
- **Pragmatic modernizer?**
- **Autocratic restorer of “order”; state authority/executive authority**
- **Thuggish strongman? Strong leader?**
- **Realist re feasibility or dreamer?**
- **Governed by emotion or reason?**
- **And if, as we’ve seen, elements of each, how (and why) did they co-evolve over time during his presidencies?**

And how widely shared within the Russian political elite were his attitudes re:

- Economic order and progress
- Political order: state authority + executive authority
- Internal security
- Political leadership
- Loss of empire
- If widely shared, how does that influence our understanding of Putin as a leader? (Forcing change [leading from front]? Implementing a widely shared agenda [leading from behind]? Or balancing disparate interests within political establishment [leading from the middle]?)

TIME LINE

- **August 1999: Putin appointed prime minister**
- **December 1999: Putin appointed “interim president”**
- **December 1999: Yeltsin resigns → Constitution requires prez election within 90 days; deal with Yeltsin**
- **March 2000: Putin elected president**
- **2000-2004: Putin’s first term as president**
- **2004-2008: Putin’s second term as president**
- **2008-2012: Dmitri Medvedev elected president**
- **2012 onward: Putin back as president; re-elected 2018 and 2024**

WHAT LESSONS DID PUTIN (AND MANY OTHERS) DRAW FROM EXPERIENCE OF THE YELTSIN YEARS?

- **“We cannot go on like this!” “Wild East” must end. Stabilize the economy. Rebuild the State**
- **Strengthen center’s control of regions and corrupt money flows; centripetal > centrifugal. Russia must not go the way of the USSR**
- **Tycoons (“oligarchs”) must not run the economy and hold the President hostage.**

- **Putin news conference (2003: the year he imprisoned tycoon Khodorkovsky): Russia “will not allow individual businesspeople to influence the political life of the country in their own corporate interests....As for those who disagree with that principle--you know what they used to say in the past: some are gone forever and others are far away.” (360) Thuggish rhetoric to make a seemingly valid political point. Personality or impression-management?**

- **Lessons, cont'd:**

Russia must seek integration into Western-led international economic and political orders, but on a dignified basis. Partnership, not “little brother” status.

THE PUTIN PRESIDENCY, 2000-2008: THE PRINCIPAL INTERNAL CHALLENGES: POLITICAL ORDER, ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, INTERNAL SECURITY, NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND A “REAL LEADER”



REBUILDING THE RUSSIAN STATE: IN SEARCH OF POLITICAL ORDER A LA PUTIN, 2000-2008

Re-invades Chechnya: state nationalism vs. ethnic nat'lism

Moves to control the regions, the oligarchs, media, and the natural resources sector

Former friends and associates become the new oligarchs

Ensure that Putin wins presidential elections and that his loyalists run parliament

Recruit leading administrators from military and security services

Theory of “managed democracy”; highest value = “stability”

People may express their interests, but only within limits defined by the state

IN SEARCH OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY: PUTIN AS PRAGMATIC MODERNIZER

Rise in oil prices → pay pensions and salaries in state sector

Stabilization Fund + foreign currency reserves

Tax changes

Growth rates, 2000-2008

Ruble collapse (1998) → “import substitution” → small business growth and new middle class; may buy and sell agric’l land

Stable expectations (complement of political “stability”)

IN SEARCH OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY, 2000

- **Had no further use for Marxism-Leninism (“that ship has sailed”), while liberalism and liberal democracy had discredited themselves during 1990s (Russian people, he says, not ready for liberal dem’y)**
- **Putin didn’t like ideologies. Was a pragmatist. But came to realize that a nation-state needs a unifying idea. Need to “cherish achievements” of its “past”:**

- **“’Why can’t we, when we listen to the anthem, think about the victory in WW II rather than the Gulag?...You must not deprive people of everything [they value]. I think about this when I remember my parents. This was part of their life.” (434) 2000: Key elements: “patriotism and religious and cultural values--- everything that...makes us a people with our own originality, different from others.” (432) Met then with Solzhenitsyn.**

IN SEARCH OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY, 2005

From 2005 onwards, goes beyond: “The new-old Russia would reject the ‘formal democracy’ of the West, proclaim a Eurasian identity, gather together its multiple faiths and ethnicities under the banner of Russian culture and Orthodoxy and be guided by a strong centralized power.” (445) This became the “national idea’ for which he had been searching. But, unlike his initial effort in 2000, it was defined in opposition to the West.

- “Russian history...fascinated him. If he had no time to read himself, he listened to audiobooks while traveling.” (461)**

IN SEARCH OF INTERNAL SECURITY

Reinvasion of Chechnya (August 1999); apt bombings; scorched earth; “outhouses”; Chechen terrorism, 1998

Chechen terrorism = Russia’s extended “9/11”; 2002-2004: multi-year nightmare of terrorism: theater, subway, airliners, school in Beslan

Seeks US-Russia collaboration against global Islamic terrorism, both before and after 9/11

Trims further the elements of democratic pluralism

“Strong state” must guarantee security to its citizens, first and foremost, guaranteed by a respected and revered leader at the top.

- **After Beslan (2004), Putin: “we demonstrated weakness...and the weak are beaten.” “The only good signal to terrorists...is a bullet in the head.” Would US negotiate with Bin Laden?, he asked.**

IN SEARCH OF A “REAL” LEADER

- Trauma in Murmansk (2000)
- Role of media
- Role of military
- Need to be present

Image-Making: 2005 in Tuva (age ~53)

By Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4920751>



Sponsors song:

**%%“I want a man like Putin,
A man like Putin, full of strength,
A man like Putin, who won’t get drunk,
A man like Putin, who won’t hurt me,
A man like Putin, who won’t run away.”%%**

In contrast to: decrepit like Brezhnev/Chernenko or a drunk like Yeltsin or a “dreamer,” like Gorbachev.

**“Vladimir Putin, A Life” Putin as President,
2000-2008: Foreign Policies**

Recall the traumas of 1999, when Putin is secretary of Security Council

- **Kosovo/Serbia/NATO**
- **First wave of NATO expansion**
- **Chechnya seceding. Note: Chechnya a part of Russian Federation. Not = “Near Abroad”; not = “foreign policy” Clinton/Albright re Chechnya.**

PUTIN'S FOREIGN POLICIES, 2000-2008

- **Putin continued Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's urge to integrate Russia into the Western political order, but on dignified terms, not as a vassal. When asked, he said that Russia could even join NATO, "But (only) if Russia's interests are taken into account and if Russia is treated as a partner with equal rights." (303) Equal treatment + full-fledged participation in decision-making + real mutual efforts to overcome the legacy of the Cold War.**

- **2000: calls on US to recognize the danger of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism and to work with Russia toward fighting it.**
- **Meets with George W. Bush to advance this agenda.**
- **When 9/11/2001 hits the US, he tells his advisors “we need to help them”; first foreign leader to call George Bush to offer condolences and assistance (“how can we help?”).**
- **When US invaded Afghanistan, he helps US with overflight rights, use of airbase in Tajikistan, intelligence assistance.**

BUT STORM CLOUDS ARE GATHERING

- **2001: Bush abrogates ABM Treaty to set up an ABM in East Europe**
- **2002: start NATO expansion talks for more of EE + Baltics**
- **2003: US invades Iraq, over Ru, Fr, and Ge objections**
- **2003: “Rose Revolution” in Georgia**
- **2004: “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine**
- **2005: “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan**

- **2005 State of Union, Bush declares that US policy is “to seek and support the growth of democratic movements in every nation and culture.” Putin saw as US arrogant exceptionalism, conveying “hubris and hypocrisy” (396)**
- **2006: US starts strong-arming NATO for Ukraine and Georgia entry**
- **2006: Bush announces missile defense system to be installed in Poland and Czecho**
- **Putin: “I’ve had enough!” (Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar*, 318)**

Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004)

- **Why called by a Russian official “our 911”? Sphere of influence thinking + Ukraine as most important. Near Abroad + ethnic affinity + diaspora + imperial nostalgia.**
- **Denounced as coup against elected leaders**
- **First Ukr prez who does not tilt toward Russia; disrupts goal of ensuring that Ukraine remain deferential to Russia**
- **Viewed as facilitated by Western powers, especially the US**
- **Slippery-slope thinking about East-West rivalry in Ukraine**
- **Fear of democratic “contagion” from Ukr to Russia → intensified repression in Russia**

Putin to Russian journalists at time of Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004): US “behaving in Europe the way the colonial powers had in Africa.” (395) He called US policy in Ukraine “a stab in the back...They are stealing Ukraine from under me.” (395) Putin: “We must not make it an international practice to resolve disputes of this kind through street riots” (Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar*, p. 274).

Putin to Bush: “What is Ukraine? Ukraine isn’t even a country. Part of its territory is in Eastern Europe, while the rest was a gift from Russia.” (427)

- **Putin starts to clamp down on foreign-supported NGOs. “We do not want our NGOs to be run by puppet-masters from abroad” (403).**
- **Oct 2006: warns Condoleezza Rice that, if Georgia causes bloodshed in Ossetia and Abkhazia (secessionist provinces within Georgia), he will respond with force. Furious when Rice said that would harm relations with US. “Georgia was a US puppet, Putin told her” (417)**
- **“Georgia exists at our expense” (388)**

- **2000: “Anyone who does not lament the collapse of the USSR lacks a heart; anyone who thinks it can be reconstituted lacks a brain.” (emotion + reason)**
- **2005: “The collapse of the USSR was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century” (meaning?) (emotion > reason?)**