

# **“Vladimir Putin”**

**OLLI Spring 2024**

**Session 4**

**“The 2000’s”**

# **Recall:**

- **2000-2001: Hopeful moments for US-Russia collaboration against Islamic-fundamentalist terrorism**

# **BUT RECALL: STORM CLOUDS 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**

- **Storm clouds, cont'd:**
- **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 pushing 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)**

- **So how to think about, and characterize, Putin at this stage?**

**Is he this?**



# Or this?



- **Aggrieved statesman or Russian imperialist?**
- **National-security concerns or “sphere of influence” ambitions?**
- **Driven by reason or by emotion?**



# Putin speech to Munich Security Conference, February 2007

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# **Putin at Munich (aggrieved statesman):**

- **“Today 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. As a result, we do not have sufficient strength to find a comprehensive solution to any one of these conflicts. Finding a political settlement also becomes impossible. We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. And independent legal norms are, as a matter of fact, coming increasingly closer to one state’s legal system. One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?”**

- **“However, what is a unipolar world? However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. It is world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And 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.”**

- **“Madam Federal Chancellor already mentioned this. The combined GDP measured in purchasing power parity of countries such as India and China is already greater than that of the United States. And a similar calculation with the GDP of the BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – surpasses the cumulative GDP of the EU. And according to experts this gap will only increase in the future.**
- **There is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of the new centers of global economic growth will inevitably be converted into political influence and will strengthen multipolarity.”**

- **After financial crisis of 2008, which caused Russian stock market to plummet 75%:**
- **This is “a further step towards strengthening a multipolar world...Faith in the United States as leader of the free world and the free market...has been undermined, I think forever.” (507)**

- **February 2008: Kosovo declares independence and West recognizes it. Putin denounces as “unlawful and immoral.”**
- **2008: NATO formally proclaims Ukraine and Georgia to be “aspiring” members for “eventual” (date unspecified) accession**
- **US Ambassador to Moscow, Nicholas Burns: “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin).” (424)**

# **PUTIN STRIKES BACK**

- **August 2008: Russia goes to war with a provoking Georgia**
- **Putin re Georgian president: “I want to hang that man by the balls!” (thuggish rhetoric; emotion)**

# **Note the series of disillusionions re US**

**Seemingly oblivious to Russia's claimed vital interests and claimed national-security concerns**

- US-led West scorns Russia's demand for Near Abroad as "sphere of influence"**
- Western celebration of democratic revolutions on Russia's borders**
- US belief that decapitation of dictators (Iraq, 2003) → democracy → Putin belief that US doesn't know what it's doing. Would later inform Russian policy in Syria.**



# **Disillusions cont'd**

- **Lesson of financial crisis of 2008: US as leader of international economic order, but with an economic system that is out-of-control and dangerous.**
- **Lessons of US foreign policy more generally: leader that expects to define norms of international conduct---but to observe them only when convenient. He knew that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction and was not a patron of Al-Qaeda. What, then, was US motive for invasion?**
- **Putin increasingly seeing enemies from within and without who, for different reasons, sought to weaken Russia.**

- **German newspaper: “The mother of all failures has been the paternalistic way in which the winner in the Cold War has treated the loser.”  
(Myers, *The New Tsar*, p. 320)**

- **What, then, does 2000-2008 teach us re Putin?**

**Was he a pragmatic modernizer or a kleptocrat?**

**Answer:**

**both, but the balance shifted over time  
(in which case, the question is:  
why the shift?)**

**Was he a “Westernizer” or a “Eurasianist”?**

**Answer: Both**

**But the balance shifted over time.**

**In which case, why the shift?**

**Was he a Russian imperialist or an aggrieved statesman?**

**Answer:**

**Both**

**What, then, brought the Russian imperialism to the fore?**

**Was he a “strong leader” or a “thuggish strongman”?**

**Answer: both**

**What, then, brought the thuggish to the fore?**

**Was he thinking “fast” or “slow” (Kahneman)?  
Driven by emotion or careful calculation?**

**Answer: first two terms,  
largely slow calculation,  
but subsequently, as we shall see,  
fast and emotional  
What, then elicited the shift?**



**Were these attitudes and inclinations unique to Putin?**

**Or did they reflect the collective orientation of the political elite?**

**Or only of certain portions of the elite? (*siloviki*)**

**Perhaps the Medvedev interregnum (2008-2012) can shed light on this?**

# 2008 with Dmitri Medvedev

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# **The Medvedev-Putin Interregnum**

**Motivation for flipping the jobs**

**Medvedev responsible for East-West relations**

**Putin responsible for relations with the “Near Abroad”:**

**---flies back from Beijing Olympics to coordinate war with Georgia**

**---prosecutes the short “gas war” with Ukraine in January 2009 to force Ukraine to pay market prices for Russian natural gas**

# President Dmitri Medvedev and Steve Jobs



# **“President” Dmitri Medvedev Interregnum, 2008-2012**

- **How did Medvedev differ from Putin?**
  - Younger: was 42 years old in 2011 (vs. Putin was 55)
  - Appeared like a Westerner and an intellectual (see photo)
  - Orientation to electronic age: visits US---meets with Obama  
+ visits Silicon Valley
  - Raised hopes that he would modernize corporate governance in Russian companies.
  - Also, that he would be more tolerant both at home and abroad;
- **BUT: No independent power base; was Putin really in charge?**

# **Obama-Medvedev “reset”**

**Obama retracts missile defense in EE**

**Ru will not put advanced missiles in Kaliningrad**

**Ru will help prevent nuclearization of Iran: Ru cooperation with negotiations + sanctions on Iran**

**Negotiate a “New START” (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty): reduce number of each side’s missile launchers.**

**Obama takes Ukraine and Georgia membership in NATO off the table “for the foreseeable future”**

**Negotiations begin (2011) for Ru to enter WTO**

**Putin allows all this, though skeptical.**

# **Libya 2011: The Turning Point**

- **UN resolution. Russia abstains at Medvedev insistence (he overruled Foreign Ministry)**
- **NATO role expansion: from protecting civilians to assisting overthrow of regime**
- **Putin revolted by videos of Gaddafi's fate**
- **Putin adds this to list of US policies of arrogance**
- **Furious with Medvedev too.**

- **Note Putin's role expansion: East-West relations had been left to Medvedev, with Putin focusing on Near Abroad policy.**
- **But Libya → Putin return to authority in both realms.**



# **Medvedev Interregnum at an End**

- Fall 2011: Putin and Medvedev announce that they had agreed to switch posts for purposes of the coming election. Indicate was intention from the start.**
- Fall 2011: parliamentary elections clearly rigged.**
- Protests by young professionals. More than 80,000 at one point. Suppressed but jarring to Putin. Wins (takes) back presidency in 2012, in rigged election.**

# **What does the Medvedev interregnum teach us about Russian politics?**

- That Putin's responses to threat were not "natural" and "realistic" response of any "rational" Russian leader?**
- That there was a genuine alternative orientation within the Russian establishment? Economic modernizer + integration into West versus mercantilist (state-directed, restrictive trade practices) + defiant of West?**
- That perhaps Putin's approach not only game in town?**
- That an alternative orientation might have hinged on conditions in foreign relations?**

# **Where is Medvedev today?**

- **No longer Prime Minister**
- **Deputy Chairman of Security Council (advisory to Putin)**
- **Currently, since invasion of Ukraine, a virulent nuclear hawk**

# **Next time: Putin in the 2010's**

- **The lead-up to invasions of Ukraine, 2014 and 2022**