

Russian Oligarchs 2014



Vladimir Putin holds a meeting with Russian oligarchs at the Catherine Hall of the Moscow Kremlin.¹

Chair: Ransom Miller
Crisis Director: Jet Situ

¹ Szakonyi, David. "Why Russian Oligarchs Remain Loyal to Putin (Op-Ed)." The Moscow Times. The Moscow Times, September 6, 2021. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2017/12/01/centrifugal-forces-why-russian-oligarchs-remain-loyal-to-the-putin-government-op-ed-a59760>.

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Chair Letter

Hello Delegates!

Welcome to BearMUN and welcome to the Russian Oligarchs Committee. My name is Ransom Miller and I will be your Chair.

I am a sophomore at UC Berkeley majoring in Global Studies with a concentration on Asia and minoring in Chinese. I am originally from Beaufort, South Carolina, but, as a military brat, I've lived all up and down the Southeast and Pacific Northwest. This will be my third semester at UCBMUN where I also serve as the Director of Sponsorships for BearMUN. At Cal, I work as the Editor-in-Chief of The Global Citizen at Berkeley where I primarily write on China's influence abroad.

In regards to this committee, I look forward to the perspectives that you will bring to these fascinating characters. Unlike many committees, our Russian Oligarchs are already extremely wealthy, and will be able to use this wealth to manipulate their environments, but not your fellow, ultra-wealthy colleagues. I recommend that you read through the background guide thoroughly before doing your own research on your particular character; these individuals control a vast portion of the Russian economy, and leveraging the particular angle through which your portfolio powers enable you to interact with the world will be critical to your success.

Best,

Ransom Miller

Chair, Russian Oligarchs

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CD Letter

Welcome to the Russian Oligarchs Committee!

My name is Jet Situ, and I am excited to be your Crisis Director for this conference!

I'm currently a junior at UC Berkeley, double majoring in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, and Business Administration, and this will be my third year as a member of UCBMUN! In the previous years, I was a part of Ad-Hoc staff; this year will be the first time in quite a while that I'm serving as Crisis Director. Of course, given my majors, UCBMUN isn't my only interest; I also play for Cal in competitive VR, and am part of an aerospace engineering club.

But enough about me, let's talk about committee and what I particularly look forward to. The year 2014 is so close to modern history that we have a slew of information to work with, so much so that plenty is deliberately excluded here, leaving plenty of room for your own research and brainstorming. Being an oligarch is a unique power in itself - simultaneously a shadowy individual, a public figure, rich, politically connected - an endless stream of possibilities await. The year 2014 is pivotal in hindsight, so we've dropped you before certain major events in order to allow you to reshape events as they happen, not only to benefit yourself, but to alter the course of Russian history.

Let's talk about the background guide for a moment - due to length restrictions, we do have to exclude plenty of information - we strongly, strongly suggest doing your own research on key events, especially those close to the start of committee. If something piques your interest - there's likely thousands of news articles behind that event, still fresh online - and that's only more power to you. There's really, really good documentaries out there, and while many of the topics discussed are ongoing (Ukraine, Syria), looking backwards in time is perhaps the best way to understand how things happen - and more importantly, how to change it.

Good luck, have fun!

Best,

Jet

situjet@berkeley.edu

PS: One final hint I'll give: actions have consequences.

Delegate Discretion is Advised

This conference is set in March 2014 - well within the memory of many people. Because of the proximity of the timeline, this crisis committee is choosing to employ some methods that many other crises do not have the opportunity to do.

This Crisis will contain:

1. Real-world footage, including those involving:
 - a. Events in Ukraine, including active and ongoing hostilities. Depictions may include weaponry and some degree of violence.
 - b. Events in Russia, including demonstrations, many of which may turn violent.
 - c. Events in Syria, which may involve videos involving terrorist organizations, violence against civilians, and active hostilities.
2. News Footage:
 - a. Describing events that have indeed happened in the real world.
3. Images:
 - a. May include distressing content.

As our crisis team will not have the time to create or edit footage during committee, most of the content depicted will have happened in real-life. If certain bits of content are deemed to be more distressing than most, crisis staff will give a standard disclaimer before displaying the content in question. If you are uncomfortable with this format, please inform the dais as soon as possible, and we will do our best to accommodate you while preserving the flow of the committee.

Procedural Overview

This Committee will abide by all UCBMUN Rules of Procedure. However, the chair retains the final discretion when it comes to committee flow, as we wish for a smooth experience that allows all delegates to have an equal chance of participation. If you are uncertain about procedure, feel free to ask the dais or raise a Point of Parliamentary Inquiry. We will do our utmost to accommodate everyone; feel free to ask crisis backroom or dais if you have any questions before and during the committee.

As outlined by UCBMUN, this crisis will be using a double-notepad system. Only one notepad may be with backroom at a time; this permits the drafting of your second note while awaiting the return of your first. Unless by Crisis Director's discretion, both notepads may not be simultaneously out of the room. For this particular crisis, we have amended the rules to permit note collection during voting bloc, though all decisions on note collection time will be made by crisis staff.

While in-room notes are permitted, UCBMUN policy makes it expressly clear that we have a zero-tolerance policy for any harassment via notes. If you feel uncomfortable with a note sent to you, please bring it up to the dais as soon as possible. Similarly, notes containing unacceptable content are also prohibited, and all final decisions on this regard are the dais's discretion. If you have further questions on what constitutes acceptability, feel free to reach out to UCBMUN staff.

This crisis committee will outline specific rules regarding what content delegate arcs may contain. In addition to the general rule that all arcs, notes, directives, and speeches be tasteful, Crisis will implement the following restrictions:

1. In light of COVID-19, all virological arcs are expressly prohibited.
2. Arcs involving the targeting of minorities, human trafficking, and exploitation are prohibited.
3. Arcs that promote real-world misinformation, such as denial of certain genocides, are expressly prohibited. Note, this is not a ban on misinformation arcs, this is a ban on arcs that deny real-world events such as the Armenian genocide, Holocaust, etc.
4. Fantasy arcs are banned. Sorry, no elves or orcs. This includes outlandish technologies, a friendly reminder that this crisis begins in March 2014.
5. This list is likely to be updated prior to the conference to reflect global events.
6. Anything else that backroom deems inappropriate, insensitive, or offensive.

However, we do want to encourage delegates to have as much freedom in their arcs as possible. If you have questions about your arcs, feel free to reach out to Crisis staff before and during the conference.

Domestic Affairs



Figure 1: A billboard supporting Putin's campaign. The sign roughly translates to, "Your voice is needed to win!"²

Introduction

On December 25th, 1991, at 7:32 PM, the flag of the Soviet Union over the Kremlin was lowered. Mikhail Gorbachev, the last president of the Soviet Union, resigned and turned over the nuclear codes to his successor, as the Russian tricolor flag was raised. This is the official start of the modern Russian Federation that we have today, and its first years would end up defining the problems that modern Russia continues to face to this day.³

The disbandment of the Soviet Union was a particularly tumultuous time. With tensions rising for a decade, the central Soviet authority gradually lost power as the individual Soviet republics began to openly express discontent and advocated for separatism as living conditions continued to deteriorate. The authority vested by the Soviet Union largely depended on an excessive amount of federal spending on defense, which, by 1991, was no longer sufficient to prevent the various republics from beginning to vie for their own right to govern.

The dissolution itself was quick – individual borders were drawn on Soviet-era lines, Russia reclaimed possession of all nuclear weapons and the majority of troops, and while other

² Macfarquhar, Neil. "Putin Is Certain to Win Re-Election, but His Support May Be Slipping." The New York Times. The New York Times, March 16, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/16/world/europe/putin-russia-election.html>.

³ Schmemmann, Serge. "The Soviet STATE, Born of a Dream, Dies." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 26, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/26/world/end-of-the-soviet-union-the-soviet-state-born-of-a-dream-dies.html>.

states engaged in a Balkan fashion of ethnic and territorial wars, Russia was able to focus on reinventing itself for the post-Soviet era.

In charge of this operation would be a single man – Boris Yeltsin.

It's important to note that the collapse of the Soviet Union is not fully popular, especially in native Russia. In August of 1991, a pro-Communist coup⁴ attempted to unseat Yeltsin, only to be defeated and result in the disbandment of the Communist Party. With the dissolution of this party, Yeltsin now had the political majority, allowing him to implement a series of reforms that would result in the oligarchy system in Russia today.

“Shock Therapy”

The Soviet Union operated under a command economy, meaning that all economic actions were those of the government directly, or those in state-owned industries. However, with Yeltsin in charge, he decided on something different – experimenting with capitalism.

In order to proceed with this plan, Yeltsin consulted with prominent free market experiments, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. The plan they came up with is called “shock therapy,” and it rests on a single key pillar: removing the government entirely from the market.⁵

This is, to say the very least, difficult in an ex-Communist state, since the vast majority of the economy is operated by the state – meaning that if the government was to fully give back the economy to the people, they would have to begin the process of privatization. The theory was simple – with the economy back in control of the people, entrepreneurs would rise up and redevelop Russia's economy. Natural resource wealth would encourage foreign investment, and in a similar fashion to China's reopening, would result in a global trade network extending and enriching the impoverished nation.

The execution, however, would be disastrous. With bribery and corrupt connections, the modus operandi of the Soviet Union, the privatization process merely gave the formerly owned state industries to rich bureaucrats with connections to politicians. In effect, the entire economy of Russia transferred from government control into the hands of a few – the creation of the oligarch class. Ex-Soviet bureaucrats had the most to gain – since owning a factory was more profitable than directing one, they were able to enrich themselves and use their newfound wealth to pay off government officials to look the other way. With strong political connections, they

⁴ “Yeltsin's Remarks: A 'REACTIONARY Coup'.” The New York Times. The New York Times, August 20, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/20/world/the-soviet-crisis-yeltsin-s-remarks-a-reactionary-coup.html>.

⁵ Sciolino, Elaine. “U.S. Is ABANDONING 'Shock THERAPY' For The Russians.” The New York Times. The New York Times, December 21, 1993. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/12/21/world/us-is-abandoning-shock-therapy-for-the-russians.html>.

were able to influence financial and monetary policy, which continued to funnel money back to them.⁶

And while this happened, the rest of the world simply watched. Under prevailing economic theory, the money vested should have eventually “trickled down” to the people, resulting in little government intervention in the economy. With the relaxation of foreign trade, the oligarchs did precisely the opposite of that – they stuffed their newfound wealth into foreign investment and Swiss banks, resulting in what is known as “capital flight” – the drastic loss of Russian domestic equity, at the time they needed it the most.⁷

Aftermath

Yeltsin’s policies predictably ended in disaster – by 1991, real GDP fell by 40%, the ruble hyperinflated (wiping out savings for the middle class), and prices for basic goods began to skyrocket. With the collapse of domestic industry, a bank run began, which resulted in credit quickly running out, as banks were unable to provide loans to businesses or people – which then led to further collapse of small businesses. With the collapse of the credit system, confidence was lost in the banking system, which essentially stopped the economy. Unsurprisingly, poverty skyrocketed, and life expectancy plummeted.⁸

In order to keep themselves afloat, Russia borrowed \$20 billion from the IMF, which still failed to cover the capital that the oligarchs continued to exploit. Meanwhile, the oligarchs continued to enrich themselves, at the expense of the rest of the people, eventually beginning to form their own collective leadership outside the reach of the central government.⁹

Semibankirschina

Semibankirschina translates loosely to “seven-banker outfit.” They were a group of seven oligarchs directly connected to Boris Yeltsin, and thanks to his policies, were able to gain control of between 50% to 70% of all of Russia’s assets. Due to their collective power, they were able to eliminate their opponents and further consolidate their wealth.¹⁰

The seven bankers associated with Semibankirschina are as follows:¹¹

⁶ Menon, Rajan. “How the Tumultuous '90s Paved the Way for Putin's Russia.” The New York Times. The New York Times, April 10, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/books/review/who-lost-russia-cold-war-peter-conradi.html>.

⁷ Passell, Peter. “Economic Scene; Russian CAPITAL FLIGHT: The Symptom or the Sin?” The New York Times. The New York Times, April 28, 1994. <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/28/business/economic-scene-russian-capital-flight-the-symptom-or-the-sin.html>.

⁸ Bohlen, Celestine. “RUSSIA Acts to FIX SINKING FINANCES.” The New York Times. The New York Times, August 18, 1998. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/18/world/russia-acts-to-fix-sinking-finances.html>.

⁹ Gordon, Michael R., and David E. Sanger. “RESCUING RUSSIA: A Special Report.; the Bailout of the Kremlin: How U.s. Pressed the I.M.F.” The New York Times. The New York Times, July 17, 1998.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/07/17/world/rescuing-russia-special-report-bailout-kremlin-us-pressed-imf.html>.

¹⁰ Lloyd, John. “The Autumn of the Oligarchs.” The New York Times. The New York Times, October 8, 2000.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/08/magazine/the-autumn-of-the-oligarchs.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

1. Boris Berezovsky, an ex-mathematician and engineer. He gained his wealth through the mass privatization under Yeltsin, turning this into media enterprises that further entrenched his wealth.
2. Mikhail Fridman: made his wealth during privatization, see character guide.
3. Vladimir Gusinsky used a holding structure to create a massive conglomerate involving construction companies and banks. He met in a secretive conference with Boris Berezovsky to discuss Yeltsin's campaign, which led to them picking Yeltsin's campaign manager and funding his reelection bid.
4. Mikhail Khodorkovsky made his wealth through vast private acquisition of oil fields in the wake of shock therapy. He served as economic adviser to Yeltsin from the very beginning, which allowed him to create his own investment fund involving government resources and seize control of former state-owned oil companies.
5. Vladimir Potanin: former Minister of Foreign Trade, see character guide.
6. Alexander Smolensky is considered to be the first private banker in Russia, setting up the first debit and credit system. After the 1998 Russian financial crisis, he lost favor with his own investors and thus disappeared from public life. He is believed to be residing in exile in Vienna.
7. Pyotr Aven, the head of Alfa-Bank alongside Mikhail Fridman, served as a former diplomat and Russia's representative to the G7, conducting high-level negotiations with Western nations. Personally appointed by Yeltsin to handle the ruble and foreign debt, he remains powerful to this day.



Figure 2: *Semibankirschina at the 1997 G8 Summit, with Yeltsin in the foreground.*

This group isn't beyond acting like a criminal organization at times, as we will cover shortly. Let's take the example of Andrey Fadin, a journalist at the *Obshaya Gazeta* newspaper. He's the man who coined the term "Semibankirschina". He also mysteriously died in a car accident less

than a year later. While this is isolated specifically to the case of the Semibankirschina themselves, we will explore their particular impact throughout Yeltsin's presidency.¹²

Yeltsin's Presidency

The formation of the oligarch class, the collapse of the Russian economy, the political disputes, and the declining living conditions in Russia are only parts of Yeltsin's less than stellar presidency. For two terms, he continued to preside over one of the most chaotic periods in Russian history.

By 1993, two years after the start of Yeltsin's policies, rising discontent resulted in the Parliament his party once controlled becoming increasingly opposed to him. As part of Yeltsin's policies, he asked for the continuation of Soviet-era expanded powers. When Parliament refused, a gradual back-and-forth escalation occurred, up until the point that Parliament attempted to impeach him numerous times, and when those failed by a slim majority, Parliament eventually ended up appointing their own executive branch to challenge Yeltsin's.¹³

The 1993 Constitutional Crisis would plunge Russia into a dual-power situation, where two separate branches of government existed simultaneously. Similar to the Communist coup just two years earlier, this crisis would resolve within a day via force, as the military sided with Yeltsin and attacked the Parliamentary building.¹⁴

In 1994, Yeltsin faced yet another crisis – The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (Chechnya) revolted against the Russian state, and immediately engaged in insurgent warfare in order to deny conventional Russian forces an advantage. At the Battle of Grozny, Russian forces suffered a Pyrrhic victory, forcing them to sign a ceasefire a year later, and further increasing public anger against Yeltsin.¹⁵

All this would come to a head in 1996, when Yeltsin would face reelection. Ranking fifth initially among candidates, and with numerous scandals still in the public mind, it would take something significant in order to continue his administration.¹⁶

That significant thing came in the form of the Semibankirchina. While other candidates had more initial support, the Semibankirchina wanted Yeltsin to remain in power, and thus, while Yeltsin officially declared a campaign fund of \$3 million, estimates place the real contribution by oligarchs to around \$500 million. Additionally, by pressuring oligarchs with positions in the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Erlanger, Steven. "Divided and Burdened, the Army Stays Neutral." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, March 24, 1993. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/24/world/crisis-in-moscow-divided-and-burdened-the-army-stays-neutral.html>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gordon, Michael R. "The Grunts of Grozny." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, February 27, 2000. <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/27/magazine/the-grunts-of-grozny.html>.

¹⁶ Specter, Michael. "The Election Shows Russia Is Russian." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, July 7, 1996. <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/07/weekinreview/the-election-shows-russia-is-russian.html>.

media, Yeltsin gained control over the airwaves, and thus was able to force the 1996 election into a runoff, which he subsequently won.¹⁷

Immediately after winning, Yeltsin would be investigated for campaign finance corruption.¹⁸ While he and the Semibankirchina would face no consequences, further discontent and scrutiny over his electoral actions would haunt him for the remainder of his career.

With Yeltsin's reelection, the existing economic policies would continue and the oligarchs would continue to be enriched; thus, capital continued to pour out of Russia at an alarming rate. This resulted in the 1998 financial crisis, which essentially crashed the ruble, and along with it, the entire Russian banking system.¹⁹ Meanwhile, fighting again arose in Chechnya,²⁰ and at this point, even the Semibankirchina had lost faith in Yeltsin. Yeltsin began suffering from increasingly dangerous heart problems, while a certain ex-KGB agent would become acting Prime Minister under Yeltsin's orders.²¹



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Figure 3: December 31st, 1999. Yeltsin gives his New Year's speech, televised across the country.

On December 31, 1999, Yeltsin would issue the following national address:

“Dear friends! My dear! Today is the last time I address you with New Year's greetings. But that's not all. Today, the last time I address you as the President of Russia. I made the decision.

¹⁷ Cowell, Alan. “Exiled Russian Oligarch Plots His Comeback.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 18, 2003. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/18/world/exiled-russian-oligarch-plots-his-comeback.html>.

¹⁸ “The Plot Thickens.” Time. Time Inc. Accessed August 29, 2021. <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,6826,00.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Albats, Yevgenia. “The Chechen War Comes Home.” The New York Times. The New York Times, October 26, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/26/opinion/the-chechen-war-comes-home.html>.

²¹ Bohlen, Celestine. “K.G.B. Veteran Is In.” The New York Times. The New York Times, August 10, 1999.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1999/08/10/world/yeltsin-dismisses-another-premier-kgb-veteran-is-in.html>.

²² “Europe | YELTSIN'S Resignation Speech.” BBC News. BBC, April 23, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6584973.stm>.

Slowly and painfully pondered over it. Today, the last day of the outgoing century, I am resigning."²³

On January 1st, 2000, Vladimir Putin would take control of Russia, and begin a series of actions that would define Russia as we know it today.²⁴

Putin's Rise to Power

The then-prominent President's rise to power had been completely improbable merely two years before Yeltsin's surprise promotion to the Presidency. Before the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin had served as a low-level KGB officer, rising to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the East German base of Dresden, a relative backwater compared to more prestigious postings in Berlin and the West. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Putin moved with his family back to his hometown of St. Petersburg, then still known as Leningrad, where he, by chance, landed a position as a Deputy to the rising politician Anatoly Sobchak.

Putin was charged with handling investments into the newly privatizing St. Petersburg economy, right at the height of "Shock Therapy."²⁵ His gambit to build casinos in coalition with associates of the Russian mob sunk a great deal of the municipal government's cash and valuable land, and saw few returns. During this time, the local legislative council launched investigations into Sobchak, and therefore Putin's, financial dealings and discovered what they described as "substantial incompetence, bordering on corruption."²⁶ Sobchak lost a bid for reelection,²⁷ but the group of colleagues that Putin courted in St. Petersburg remained lifelong friends.

After a brief period of unemployment, Putin was hired by the Kremlin to serve in a variety of positions within the Yeltsin administration all within the space of less than two years, going from Deputy Chief of the Presidential Property Management Department (where he investigated the books of Russia's wealthiest) to heading the KGB's successor organization, the Federal Security Service (FSB). His illegal extradition of his old mentor Sobchak impressed Yeltsin, and before long, he was promoted to the Prime Ministership.²⁸ By then, association with Yeltsin was considered political poison. His final mind game with the Parliament was to appoint a litany of unknown bureaucrats as Prime Minister in quick succession, and Putin was thought to be his final death throes.

The Second Chechen War

At the time of Putin's ascension to Prime Minister, he was a minor figure in Russian politics; only 2% of Russians favored him.²⁹ Directly following Putin's nomination, Chechnya,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bohlen, Celestine. "Yeltsin Resigns, Naming Putin as Acting President to Run in MARCH ELECTION." The New York Times. The New York Times, January 1, 2000.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/01/world/yeltsin-resigns-overview-yeltsin-resigns-naming-putin-acting-president-run-march.html>.

²⁵ Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 83–84.

²⁶ Ibid, 81.

²⁷ Ibid, 100.

²⁸ Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), pp. 234, 329.

²⁹ Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 164.

the Russian province that had fought for independence in a bloody and highly unpopular war three years earlier, began an invasion of its neighboring, fellow Muslim-majority province, Dagestan,³⁰ and Putin seized the opportunity. He requested additional powers over the Russian military and security forces from Yeltsin, which Yeltsin, who was still President at the time, granted him. Putin brought the entire force to bear on Chechnya, invading with the same army size as that which had invaded Afghanistan less than twenty years earlier, except with a target one-fortieth its size.³¹

The political establishment in Moscow chided Putin for what they thought would be a deeply unpopular conflict, but they were quickly proven incorrect. A series of three terrorist bombings struck across Russia, killing about 300 civilians, all attributed to the Chechens.³² Public fear was widespread and Russian support mounted for the military victories in Chechnya and Dagestan. Putin drove the attention toward himself, engaging in blatant acts of political theater, appearing in military jackets piloting aircraft and bringing the press with him into former conflict areas.³³ In a nation where no one had known him just weeks before, Putin now had a 27% approval rating, only one point behind the favored winner.³⁴

In September of 1999 in Ryazan, a bus driver noticed a white car idling outside his apartment building, with a man sitting in the driver seat. A nervous young woman stood nearby for a while, until another man emerged from the hotel and got in the car with her and drove away. Public panic was still high from the terrorist attacks, so the bus driver reported the incident to local police, who, on investigation, discovered three hefty bags of explosives planted in the building, labelled as sugar, set to detonate at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. A manhunt was launched all across the city, and although the two men were briefly apprehended they flashed official FSB (Federal Security Service) badges and were released.³⁵ Insiders began to doubt that the Chechens were behind the bombings and questioned whether the government had orchestrated the attacks.³⁶ No blame would ever credibly be brought against an oligarch or government agent, but the serendipitous timing for Putin's career appeared now in a more cynical light.

By the time of Yeltsin's resignation, the war in Chechnya had dragged to a halt. The initial conquests of some major cities had led to fierce guerilla fighting throughout the countryside and heavy bombardment of a few remaining holdouts. The death toll of Russian troops began to weigh heavily on the public.³⁷ Putin, however, had much more ambitious plans for Russia than just the war in Chechnya.

³⁰ Ibid, 151-153.

³¹ Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 238

³² Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 156-159.

³³ Ibid, 155.

³⁴ Ibid, 164.

³⁵ Ibid, 159.

³⁶ Ibid, 183-187.

³⁷ Ibid, 180-183.



Figure 4: September 1999. A series of suspected Chechen bombings target apartment buildings in Moscow, killing 307 and injuring thousands.³⁸

Putin's New Groove

As Putin took power in 2000, Russians faced a variety of problems. Standards of living had shot down following the “Shock Therapy” of the early 1990s, and the government was in an unfavorable position to improve the lives of its citizens. The new Russian state was fundamentally weak - it was unable to collect taxes, maintain a modern military force, or handle corruption. The government lacked the bureaucracy to monitor each corporation's income and profits, so it instead taxed only on the difference between exports and imports. Putin sought to expand government oversight of taxes while simplifying the tax code to a flat 13% rate.³⁹ The measure was successful in bringing additional funding into government coffers, although much of that result was also based on the rising price of oil.

The Russian economy is based primarily on the extraction of natural resources: oil, coal, natural gas, aluminium, uranium, steel, asbestos - the sheer scale of Russia's land mass allows it to be sustained by the sale of these valuable minerals and fuels. Of these, oil and natural gas make up the largest portion, and it is estimated that around 60% of Russian GDP is tied to mining and extraction.⁴⁰ Putin's PhD dissertation (which was heavily plagiarized and is widely thought to have been ghostwritten by his rector, Vladimir Litvinenko) made a prediction: the Russian economy can sustain itself on the sale of its natural resources until about halfway through the 21st century.⁴¹ So when the price of oil surges globally, the Russian economy booms, and when it falls, the Russian economy busts.

Putin used the new income from the reformed tax code and the oil bump to boost pensions by 12% and then 20%, which brought his popularity to record highs.⁴² The formal

³⁸ Eckel, Mike. “Two Decades On, SMOLDERING Questions about The Russian President's Vault to Power.” RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Two Decades On, Smoldering Questions About The Russian President's Vault To Power, August 20, 2019. <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-russia-president-1999-chechnya-apartment-bombings/30097551.html>.

³⁹ Shapiro, Ian. “From Soviet Communism to Russian Gangster Capitalism.” Yale University DeVane Lectures. (retrieved July 3, 2021).

⁴⁰ The Moscow Times, www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/03/14/russias-natural-resources-valued-at-60-of-gdp-a64800. (retrieved September 3, 2021).

⁴¹ Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 156-159.

⁴² *Ibid*, 179.

economy under which the nation operated hadn't fundamentally changed in any way since the Yeltsin era, but with cash in their pockets, Russians thought of Putin as their benefactor, the first sign of benefits from the privatization that wrought havoc on the nation. This all led up to the parliamentary and Presidential elections of 2000. Putin's approval rating had soared to 40%⁴³ and he refused to campaign for both the party that supported him, Unity, or his own candidacy for President: his act was to play as above it all, continuing his duties with similar moments of theater as those that won him the job in the first place.⁴⁴ Putin was a success, defeating minor opponents and forcing those with positions close to his own to withdraw and endorse him, winning 53% of the vote.⁴⁵

The Silovarchs

The oligarchs that had existed under Yeltsin retained their power initially, but many of them were curbed under Putin's first term. Mikhail Khodorkovsky was the most public of these crackdowns; he questioned whether the government sold an oil rig at a rate far exceeding its value, but the valuation was done on Putin's orders. Putin was enraged by the slight, and Khodorkovsky was harrassed, investigated, and prosecuted on a variety of charges. His imprisonment drew international attention, but his sentence stayed and his assets were seized by the government.⁴⁶ Vladimir Gusinsky was arrested in 2000 after his media company NTV publicly questioned the FSB's involvement in the Chechen terror bombings and was forced to sell his media company to the state.⁴⁷ Boris Berezovsky's media company was seized and he was exiled following negative coverage of a nuclear submarine accident.⁴⁸

In the place of these men, there was no lessening of corruption or wealth redistribution; instead, in stepped the Silovarchs, a new breed of oligarch. Siloviki is the Russian word for strong man, like a warlord or mob boss. Within 'The Company,' as Putin's inner circle at the Kremlin came to be known, were former KGB, ex-military, gangsters, and businessmen of all kinds. Putin appointed those who he knew and trusted from St. Petersburg to government positions and the board of corporations that the state had reacquired. Government contracts are fulfilled by members of The Company and their tax returns go uninspected.⁴⁹

The rules of the game are totally different under Putin than those given to the oligarchs under Yeltsin. Involvement in politics is fair game, just as long as that involvement supports the interests of the Kremlin. The political corruption and violence that they maintain exists on a different scale - they own police, they own militaries, they trade in government contracts. Their wealth's origin lies at the center of the Kremlin and their political aspirations help to maintain their grip on this power. Because all of these people got their start directly from Putin, the only

⁴³ Ibid, 166.

⁴⁴ Ibid 177-179.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 183.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 224-226, 234-236.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 200-201.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 198-201.

⁴⁹ Treisman, Daniel. "Putin's silovarchs." *Orbis* 51.1 (2007): 141-153.

stipulation of their immense wealth is absolute loyalty: no bad press about Putin, no resistance to his decisions, and no questioning his authority.

Russian Dissenters

Public dissent to Putin's regime and, therefore, the world of the oligarchy has been severely muted since his consolidation of power in the early 2000s. With the media tycoons of Yeltsin squashed beneath the fist of a resurgent Kremlin, by 2013, it was clear where open opposition to Putin would lead. Most of the activists who support a democratic Russia live in other countries and even then, their lives are in danger if they stray too far into antagonism with the Kremlin.

With classic characters of resistance out of the way, new, internet-based media operations have become the forefront of opposition to Putin. The primary character in this fight has been Alexei Navalny, whose internet blog to fight against corruption became an online sensation with his pointed, legible attacks on Putin's system. Navalny is a lawyer who gained prominence following several high profile investigations of corruption between Putin and the oligarchs. Navalny had no power to litigate his claims in the Russian criminal justice system, but the evidence he presented struck a chord with the public. In a radio interview, Navalny labelled Putin's party of United Russia "the party of swindlers and thieves," a moniker that has become famous.⁵⁰ With charisma and good looks, Navalny was the first real threat to the total dominance of Putin's single-party state.

In late 2011, opposition came to a head during Putin's campaign for a third term in the Presidency, his first since allowing Dmitry Medvedev to serve a term as President while he remained as Prime Minister. By the time of the election, Putin's popularity was still high, but not anywhere near the highs of the end of his previous term as President in 2008.⁵¹ A new generation of young, educated, usually urban Russians subverted the dominance of the Kremlin over traditional media through satire and dissent on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Putin's brand of propaganda was stale, and despite weathering the financial recession better than most nations, slowed economic growth made for discontent. Putin was even publicly booed at an appearance at the newly built Olympic stadium in Sochi.⁵² With concerns about the margin of Putin's victory as well as the chances of his party, (United Russia barely squeaking through a majority⁵³), the administration rigged the election more blatantly than ever before.

While the regime was able to silence the voices of official election observers, they were unable to suppress the ordinary people who recorded the events they saw transpire at the ballot box for the Russian parliament that December. Men stuffed ballots with total disregard for video cameras and voters were bussed from poll to poll to match the turnout and percentage points that

⁵⁰ Parfitt, Tom. "Russian Opposition Activist Alexei Navalny Fined for Suggesting United Russia Member WAS THIEF." The Telegraph. Telegraph Media Group, June 5, 2012. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/9312508/Russian-opposition-activist-Alexei-Navalny-fined-for-suggesting-United-Russia-member-was-thief.html>.

⁵¹ Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 392-394.

⁵² *Ibid*, 392.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 394-395.

Putin decreed.⁵⁴ Public outrage was quicker and more virulent than the Kremlin had expected. As the final results were tallied, thousands gathered near the center of Moscow despite a cold rain.⁵⁵ The people came from all backgrounds and all sides of the political spectrum, old communists and young liberals united by a hatred of Putin. Alexei Navalny was the center of attention within all of the chaos and his rhetoric united the crowd. Navalny and a dozen or so others were arrested as they marched towards the election commission's headquarters. The peaceful protests spread across cities over the following weeks, and grew to such a size that the Kremlin had to allow government-controlled news stations to cover, for fear of risking irrelevance.

As the opposition grew in strength, community leaders like the Russian Orthodox Church and Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's President at the time (Putin ruled through the Prime Ministership for a term) called for reconciliation between the protestors and the government, even offering to restore regional elections and ease political party formation restrictions.⁵⁶ But then, after a meeting between Putin and the leaders of the seven largest faiths in Russia, the tone changed. The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church voiced his support for Putin, comparing the Yeltsin era to Hitler's invasion and hailing Putin as the nation's savior. The faithful of Russia rallied between the highly religious Putin, against forces of liberal disorder, like those of the protestors.



Figure 5: December 9th, 2011. Alexei Navalny at a protest, one of the largest against Putin thus far, with an attendance of 30,000.⁵⁷

By the time of the Presidential election in March of 2012, Putin was once again in control of the nation. Unofficial polls showed he had the genuine support of the majority of Russians, and although election fraud was still commonplace as it had been the previous December, the Kremlin showed some support for democratic values that engendered public goodwill.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 394-395.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 395-397.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 402-406.

⁵⁷ Barry, Ellen. "Rousing Russia with a Phrase." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 9, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/10/world/europe/the-saturday-profile-blogger-aleksei-navalny-rouses-russia.html>.

Ultimately, the returns showed Putin with 63% of the vote nationally,⁵⁸ an inflated number, but one that everyone agreed probably represented the opinion of most people. The protests following the election were deflated, and even Navalny admitted, “We overestimated our force”.⁵⁹

Foreign Affairs



Figure 6: Unknown date. “Little green men” in Simferopol, Crimea, outside what appears to be a government building. Their armaments match standard Russian equipment.⁶⁰

The Ukrainian Situation

Ukraine is in a precarious political situation. With Russia to their East, and the European Union to their West, Ukraine acts as a buffer zone. Historically, this has resulted in Ukraine being a key partner of Russia in the region, which is seen in numerous defense pacts and economic ties across the border.

Both Russian and Ukrainian leaders understand the importance of continuing ties. It’s also key to note the incentive on the Russian side - should Ukraine join with the west, NATO troops could threaten the Russian border, a scenario Russia is keen to avoid.⁶¹

But in 2014, Ukraine would see itself go through a new revolution.

⁵⁸ Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 406.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 407.

⁶⁰ Jack, Andrew. “Ukraine’s ‘Little Green Men’ Carefully Mask Their Identity.” *Financial Times*. Financial Times, April 16, 2014. <https://www.ft.com/content/05e1d8ca-c57a-11e3-a7d4-00144feabdc0>.

⁶¹ Bruni, Frank. “PRESIDENT Urging Expansion of Nato to Russia’s Border.” *The New York Times*. The New York Times, June 16, 2001. <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/16/world/president-europe-overview-president-urging-expansion-nato-russia-s-border.html>.

European Union-Ukrainian Association Agreement

Ukraine benefits from vast mineral and resource wealth, much of it being exported to either its local trading partner, Russia, or through extensive singular deals to its largest customer, the European Union. The European Union, on the other hand, wanted a binding trading agreement, one which would encourage stability through trade in the region and thus protect European interests abroad. For decades now, diplomats in both Ukraine and the European Union have been pushing toward a unified trade agreement, similar to what the European Union currently has with Norway and other Scandinavian states.⁶² What they achieved is called the European Union-Ukrainian Association Agreement (EUUAA), a trade agreement which would've set proper imports and export agreements for a litany of industries.

After a lot of work, in 2013, the European Union had a copy that they could present to the government of Ukraine, which, upon seeing, the government of Ukraine promptly rejected.⁶³

Euromaidan

The EUUAA was more than just a trade agreement, however, and it wasn't something that could be reworked. Rather, it was seen as a referendum on the future of Ukraine – whether to side with their historical ally, Russia, or the European Union. As a common trend, this has resulted in the youth of Ukraine and those concentrated in cities to be more pro-EU, while the elder establishment were pro-Russia, and the rejection of the EUUAA would turn out to be the last straw.⁶⁴

On the night of November 21st, 2013, mass protests erupted in Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), at the center of Kiev. Spearheaded by university students, this new protest movement became known as Euromaidan (pro-EU, occupying Maidan), with three objectives – implement the EUUAA, impeach President Viktor Yanukovich, and restore the Ukrainian Constitution of 2004, which would weaken the executive branch.⁶⁵

⁶² Kramer, Andrew E. "European Union SUSPENDS Trade Talks With Ukraine." The New York Times. The New York Times, December 15, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/16/world/europe/ukraine-protests.html>.

⁶³ "A Chance for Change in Ukraine." The New York Times. The New York Times, April 1, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/opinion/global/a-chance-for-change-in-ukraine.html>.

⁶⁴ David. "Unrest Deepens in Ukraine as Protests Turn Deadly." The New York Times. The New York Times, January 22, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/23/world/europe/ukraine-protests.html>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.



Figure 7: December 8th, 2013. Hundreds of thousands of protestors fill the streets of Kiev, occupying Maidan Square in the middle of winter.⁶⁶

Approximately 400,000-800,000 protestors appeared to occupy Maidan Square, setting up tents and holding out in negative degree Celsius temperatures throughout the night. In response, the government deployed Berkut, special riot police/secret police in order to try to disperse the square. Over the course of the next several weeks, violent riot dispersal techniques were used, injuring thousands of protestors.⁶⁷

Proper police doctrine typically relies on police using de-escalation tactics, which attempt to disperse a protest by breaking up the mob mentality and naturally encouraging people to go home. This is because the police are always outnumbered, and if violence does happen, then the situation spirals out of control.⁶⁸

After the violent police response, riots broke out across Kiev: a statue of Lenin was toppled, Maidan was retaken by protestors, and constant clashes occurred at the various police lines and checkpoints around the city. Despite temperatures reaching -13 degrees Celsius, the crowd continued to grow, forcing the police back. This only resulted in further escalation, culminating in the use of live ammunition by Berkut, as well as water cannons, equally effective in the freezing temperatures.⁶⁹

But before we proceed onto the Ukrainian revolution proper, we must address some other equally important events occurring concurrently.

⁶⁶ Steinzova, Lucie, and Kateryna Oliynyk. "Fight for DIGNITY: Remembering The Ukrainian Revolution." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Fight For Dignity: Remembering The Ukrainian Revolution, November 22, 2018. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-politics-euromaidan-protests/29608541.html>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Schwartz, Mattathias. "Who Killed the Kiev Protesters? A 3-d Model Holds the Clues." The New York Times. The New York Times, May 30, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/30/magazine/ukraine-protest-video.html>.

⁶⁹ Kramer, Andrew E., and Andrew Higgins. "Ukraine's Forces ESCALATE Attacks against Protesters." The New York Times. The New York Times, February 20, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/21/world/europe/ukraine.html>.

Antimaidan and Suspicious Circumstances

While Kiev and major cities may give the impression that Euromaidan was a popular revolution, elsewhere, that's perhaps less truthful. It's easier to draw the connections between urban areas and pro-EU support; both culture and economy is tied to the benefits of aligning with the European Union, but elsewhere, the lines become far more murky, especially the more eastward one goes.⁷⁰

Take Donetsk, for example, one of the largest cities in the eastern side of Ukraine, home to Donetsk International Airport, where pro-government protestors vastly outnumbered Euromaidan supporters in that city. Another example is Crimea, a majority-Russian province that has become the hub to resistance against Euromaidan, and increasingly leans toward total separation from Ukraine. These regions are only the symptoms of a larger trend - it's evident that Euromaidan is more or less a Ukrainian partisan position - a recent poll⁷¹ conducted indicated that only slightly over half of the population supported the Euromaidan movement.⁷²

In Kiev itself, counter-Euromaidan activity has also been developing, but of a more suspicious nature. In mid-January, sniper fire targeted protestors, and while the suspects remain on the run, it's widely believed to be trained Russian or Berkut snipers. In the same month, the Trade Unions Building, the headquarters of Euromaidan, was targeted in a pipe bombing, ostensibly done by Berkut forces. And all this violence would eventually come to a head in February 2014, when the Ukrainian revolution would truly begin.⁷³

Ukrainian Revolution

In February 2014, the watershed moment finally happened. Thousands of Euromaidan protestors were once again injured in massive clashes with police in and around Maidan, the Trade Unions Building was burned down, and the Interior Affairs Minister authorized the use of live ammunition against protestors.⁷⁴

The combination of these events forced the hand of the government, and opposition parties in Parliament gained control, forcing a compromise deal with President Yanukovich, already weakened from the day's events. The use of live ammunition was suspended, the police were forced to stand down, and the protestors triumphed, gaining control of the entire city of Kiev.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Chivers, C. J. "A Kiev Question: What Became of THE MISSING?" The New York Times. The New York Times, March 10, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/10/world/europe/a-kiev-question-what-became-of-the-missing.html>.

⁷¹ Ucl. "South-Eastern Ukraine: Extremism and The Anti-Maidan." SSEES Research Blog SouthEastern Ukraine Extremism and the AntiMaidan Comments. Accessed August 29, 2021. <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/2014/05/09/south-eastern-ukraine-extremism-and-the-anti-maidan/>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Higgins, Andrew. "Ukrainian Protesters See Too Many Familiar Faces in Parliament after Revolution." The New York Times. The New York Times, February 24, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/world/europe/ukraine-parliament.html>.

Yanukovych took the very unsurprising action of running away, and in response, Parliament voted 328-0 for impeaching him. Unfortunately, they are currently unable to serve his arrest – he ran away to Kharkiv for a “conference,” and then hopped on another flight to Russia, where, for now, he maintains that he’s the legitimate leader.⁷⁶

Present Situation

Ukraine continues to be in a state of crisis. While the majority of Ukraine is pro-Euromaidan, in the counter-Euromaidan territories, there is increasing talk of separatism. International media has already noticed that suspicious men with no identification have already taken over large parts of Crimea. While the truth isn’t out quite yet, they are a combination of Russian mercenaries, special forces, and regular troops deployed to the region in order to begin a takeover after the Ukrainian revolution. These are known as “little green men,” and may have a role to play later.⁷⁷

But first, the Ukrainian parliament must tackle the loss of their executive branch. For now, while elections are in May, Oleksandr Turchynov is the acting president, and Arseniy Yatsenyuk is the acting prime minister.⁷⁸

The Syrian Situation



Figure 8: Unknown date. A member of the White Helmets, a humanitarian organization, rescues a child in the aftermath of a Syrian airstrike.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Higgins, Andrew, Andrew E. Kramer, and Steven Erlanger. “As His Fortunes Fell in Ukraine, a President Clung to Illusions.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 24, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/24/world/europe/as-his-fortunes-fell-in-ukraine-a-president-clung-to-illusions.html>.

⁷⁷ Higgins, Andrew, Michael R. Gordon, and Andrew E. Kramer. “Photos Link Masked Men in East Ukraine to Russia.” The New York Times. The New York Times, April 21, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/21/world/europe/photos-link-masked-men-in-east-ukraine-to-russia.html>.

⁷⁸ Smale, Alison. “Just like His Power, UKRAINIAN Ex-Leader Vanishes into Thin Air.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 25, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/25/world/europe/just-like-his-power-ukrainian-ex-leader-vanishes-into-thin-air.html>.

⁷⁹ “Images (En).” Syria Civil Defence. <https://www.syriacivildefence.org/en/>.

Before discussing Syria, it's important to discuss the incentive for Russia to be involved in the Middle East. With an abundance of natural resources and a vast diversity of ethnicities, religions, and governments, the region has been prone to near-endless conflict. It's a perfect place for a proxy war, and that's precisely what's been going on for the past several decades.⁸⁰

While the proxy wars are still ongoing, the current situation is unfavorable to Russian forces. With the collapse of Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and the United States intervening as part of the Global War on Terror, Russian geopolitical influence in the Middle East is on the verge of being fully extinguished. The map favors the United States – the Gulf States, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, have all aligned with the Western powers. Pakistan has engaged both China and the U.S., with little room for Russia, while Iran has isolated itself diplomatically from the remainder of the world.⁸¹

This leaves Syria, the last bastion of Russian geopolitical influence in the area. The situation is simple – should Syria fall, Russia would be geographically kicked out of the Middle East. Under no circumstances can that happen.⁸²

A Brief Recap of the Syrian Uprising

In 2011, an event known as the Arab Spring swept the Middle East. Using social media and improved technology, mass protests against the existing authoritarian regimes led to sweeping changes in many nations, with some adopting more Western-style democratic ideals, and others forced into further chaos as governments attempted to appease protestors while holding onto power. However, the Syrian Arab Spring, and the ensuing response, would lead to one of the deadliest conflicts to emerge in the 21st century.⁸³

Rather than traditional riot police, Syria chose to violently suppress their protests (similar to what happened in Ukraine). This involved the use of live ammunition against protestors, followed by tanks storming Syrian cities in order to try to quell the uprising. Army corps began to siege protesting cities, which led to the emergence of “starvation tactics” that would become a common atrocity in the ongoing conflict.⁸⁴

These tactics are unsustainable. And unsustainable violent tactics inevitably lead to revolution.

⁸⁰ Nazer, Fahad. “Saudi Arabia's Proxy Wars.” The New York Times. The New York Times, September 20, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/21/opinion/global/saudi-arabias-proxy-wars.html>.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Barnard, Anne. “Battle to Retake Syrian City Turns into a Geopolitical Test of the War.” The New York Times. The New York Times, February 8, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/08/world/middleeast/battle-al-bab-syria-geopolitical-test.html>.

⁸³ Slackman, Michael. “Syrian Troops Open Fire on Protesters in Several Cities.” The New York Times. The New York Times, March 25, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/26/world/middleeast/26syria.html>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

The Syrian Civil War, Up Until Now.

The brutal suppression of the uprisings inevitably led entire sections of the Syrian army to defect. In July 2011, after two months of continuous defections, opposition forces united to form the Free Syrian Army, or the FSA for short. This marks the beginning of the insurgency phase of the Syrian Civil War, spearheaded by this singular rebel faction.⁸⁵

Defectors of the Syrian army turned out to have an advantage – with motivation to fight, and being a defensive force, they were able to repel Syrian Army attackers, who tended to be relatively untrained and unmotivated to fight against their own people. While ceasefires mediated by the UN and Egypt were attempted, these ultimately broke down, leading only to further clashes.⁸⁶

In 2012, the Syrian Civil War began to escalate, with the FSA staging large scale offensives designed to seize major cities and force al-Assad, the Syrian President, to capitulate. Rebel forces, augmented by Kurdish separatists, were able to make major gains in cities, as generals from the Syrian Army defected and turned over major air bases and military installations to rebel forces.⁸⁷ With the capture of cities along major roads, rebel forces were further able to interdict supplies and prevent the Syrian army from being able to make any significant gains throughout 2013; however, to give the army credit, they were able to protect Damascus, the capital of Syria, from falling.⁸⁸

The Inter-Rebel Conflict

As explored, motivation is a key part of the Syrian conflict. And this motivation could only result in one thing – further violence as groups diverged in belief, and began to fight for increasingly radicalized ideals, eventually fighting against each other.⁸⁹

The FSA is made up largely of the Syrians and defectors from the Syrian army, with the goal of deposing the Assad regime. These are the primary rebels, those who continue to wage the majority of battles against the regime, and thus, take the majority of losses.⁹⁰

However, another group doesn't just have the goal of deposing Assad, they also have the goal of carving out territory for themselves in order to enact their own version of Islamic law. Al-Nusra,⁹¹ which is essentially just Al-Qaeda⁹² but reformed into an army, broke off from the

⁸⁵ Bakri, Nada. "Armed Groups Are on Rise in Syria, as Are Civil War Fears." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 17, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/18/world/middleeast/armed-attacks-on-syrian-sites-appear-to-rise.html>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Fahim, Kareem. "Syrian Rebels Make Inroads with Help of Armed Fighters." The New York Times. The New York Times, January 27, 2012. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/28/world/middleeast/violence-rises-sharply-in-syria-flustering-arab-league-monitors.html>.

⁸⁸ Barnard, Anne. "Syrian Forces Recapture Damascus Suburb from Rebels." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 14, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/14/world/middleeast/syrian-forces-recapture-damascus-suburb-from-rebels.html>.

⁸⁹ "Syrian Opposition Factions in the Syrian Civil War." bellingcat, December 7, 2016.

<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2016/08/13/syrian-opposition-factions-in-the-syrian-civil-war/>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

FSA,⁹³ and began to fight both the government and the FSA in a bid to claim territory for themselves.⁹⁴

Continued disagreements would lead to the formation of Jund al-Aqsa,⁹⁵ and Ahrar al-Sham,⁹⁶ both smaller examples of breakaway factions that resulted as a result of internal disagreements among the larger military council, which would continue to splinter the once unified rebel force.⁹⁷

In short, what once was the FSA under a single banner rapidly deteriorated into several groups over numerous disagreements on Islamic interpretation, goals of the war, military leadership, asset control, and territorial disputes. This is known as the Inter-Rebel conflict.⁹⁸ As a result of this conflict, the United States has temporarily halted their aid to the FSA, for fear their weapons could easily land in the hands of an Islamist faction.⁹⁹

The Secondary Inter-Rebel Conflict

Also fighting against the Assad regime is the Kurdish people, who are organized under the Syrian Democratic Forces, or the SDF.¹⁰⁰ Their goal is simple – to make an independent Kurdish Syria in the north. There is an unofficial truce between the SDF and the Syrian Army - due to other rebel forces attacking their position, neither side has the resources to spare to attack each other. This has resulted in the de facto governance of an independent Kurdistan in northern Syria.¹⁰¹

However, the aforementioned Islamist factions are attacking the SDF – largely out of territorial reasons, though the SDF has remained powerful enough to repel all current attempts.¹⁰² This isn't to say that the SDF is invincible – as of late, Turkish forces have begun engaging the PKK, a subsidiary of the SDF, with the possible intention of invading Kurdistan itself.¹⁰³

The Third Group

The deterioration of the security situation in neighboring Iraq has birthed numerous insurgencies, part of whom have already joined the conflict in Syria as part of Islamist factions. But there is one group, rapidly gaining territory, that is important to discuss.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Cagaptay, Soner. "Next up: Turkey vs. Iran." The New York Times. The New York Times, February 14, 2012. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/15/opinion/next-up-turkey-vs-iran.html>.

They call themselves ISIL, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, and have begun attacking FSA positions along the border. They've declared a capital in Raqqa, Syria, and appear to be beyond a common insurgency – a possibility of being an Islamic ground army.¹⁰⁴

ISIL is known to be violent – journalists have been kidnapped and ransomed, and the situation is likely to further destabilize. ISIL has no allies, only enemies, as every other faction mentioned is at war with them.¹⁰⁵

The Current Situation

Without support, the Syrian army is unlikely to win the war. Their single advantage, air power, has only resulted in further anger from their own people, feeding into rebel forces. What's feared by the international community is a possible takeover by hardline Islamist groups, be it from Al-Nusra, or ISIL, which may invite Western forces to stage a direct intervention. Regardless, Russia must act, or risk losing its last geopolitical ally in the region.



Figure 9: Unknown date. A young Kurdish sniper stands on top of a building in the ruins of Kobani.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Russia faces a litany of problems and opportunities: the occupation of Crimea, the conflict in Syria, access to European-facing natural gas pipelines, the fluctuating price of oil, and a struggling opposition to Putin. At the center of all these conflicts are the oligarchs, largely crowned by Putin himself, their wealth built on the sheer scale of his power, and the power of the

¹⁰⁴ Hubbard, Ben, and Karam Shoumali. "Extremists Take Syrian Town Near Turkey Border." The New York Times. The New York Times, September 19, 2013. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/19/world/middleeast/extremists-take-syrian-town-on-turkeys-border.html>.

¹⁰⁵ "Two Spanish Journalists Abducted in Syria." Committee to Protect Journalists, December 10, 2013. <https://cpj.org/2013/12/two-spanish-journalists-abducted-in-syria/>.

¹⁰⁶ Fisher, Max. "Straightforward Answers to Basic Questions About Syria's War." The New York Times. The New York Times, September 18, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/19/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-bashar-al-assad-refugees-islamic-state.html>.

Russian state. These oligarchs, billionaires and strongmen alike, have profited greatly from the last decade of relative peace and prosperity in Russia - will the next ten years be the same?

The Modern Oligarch

It bears repeating, if it has not already been conveyed, that the oligarchy that exists today is one quite unlike that which existed in the 1990s, and therefore, it is far removed from the oligarchy that exists in Western imagination. Putin's oligarchs are not robber barons, most did not make their money from privatization schemes. The vast majority made their wealth from lucrative government contracts, or from the government reacquisition of previously sold assets. This means that, unlike the old oligarchy, the new one is entirely tied to the functions of government. Bureaucracy and aristocracy are intertwined in this new world, where the men that make up Putin's high school judo club are some of the most powerful men on the planet. It is not an exaggeration to say that Putin owns these men, he gave them everything they have.

The struggle among the oligarchy is a struggle to please the Kremlin. Putin keeps his directions vague, and leaves room for interpretation. The oligarchs fight to prove who is the most loyal, who can follow his orders the fastest, respond with the most strength, and fund state projects with the most money.

Capital flight from the Yeltsin era has had cascading consequences into today. Russian wealth held abroad is thought to equal the total wealth of all Russian households combined,¹⁰⁷ with wealth disparity reaching new highs under Putin, as 35% of all financial assets are held by just 110 people.¹⁰⁸ The continuing pattern of investment abroad lost the Russian economy approximately 880 billion USD in assets between 2002 and 2011.¹⁰⁹ Putin has put a stop on major foreign investors inside Russia, passing laws to restrict foreign corporations from doing business and forcing them to liquidate their assets to the oligarchs.

The oligarchs themselves generally exist in two categories: the liberal technocrats with a background in economics and business and the siloviki whose background is in the military and espionage. The former group might conform to Western notions of the ultra-rich, using their insider economic information to reap the benefits of loyalty; the latter act more like independent autocrats, wielding vast private armies and managing transnational criminal organizations.

In the current world order, no one can conceive of Russia without Putin.

¹⁰⁷ Novokmet, Filip, Thomas Piketty, and Gabriel Zucman. "From Soviets to oligarchs: inequality and property in Russia 1905-2016." *The Journal of Economic Inequality* 16, no. 2 (2018): 202.

¹⁰⁸ Suisse, Credit. "Global wealth report 2013." Zurich: Crédit Suisse. <https://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file> (2013): 53.

¹⁰⁹ Kar, Dev, and Brian LeBlanc. *Illicit financial flows from developing countries: 2002-2011*. Washington, DC: Global Financial Integrity, 2013: 13.

The Russian People

The people of Russia are highly supportive of the Kremlin, which is unsurprising given the absolute control that Putin's oligarchs have over most forms of media. The resistance movement has grown stronger over recent years, but it remains divided along ideological lines. Some of the resistance are market liberals, some are hardline communists, a few are social anarchists, most are still pretty conservative. Movements like the socially-liberal punk band Pussy Riot, which draws great appreciation among Western liberals, divide the opposition and produce infighting. At the moment they exist on a scale that is manageable to Russian leadership.

The Russian public as a whole is not nostalgic for the Soviet era; they are nostalgic for Russian preeminence in the world. Many remember the promises made by the Americans in the 1990s to not expand NATO further into the former Soviet Union, and how this promise was broken. Putin has always viewed the United States as an enemy, but now the Russian media advances his worldview. Whenever a crisis happens in Russia or internationally, the U.S.A. is always blamed, whether or not they had anything to do with an event. Putin positions himself as a victim of foreign conspiracies, and for now, this tactic seems to be persuasive with a majority of the Russian public.

The Russian people are also some of the most highly educated in the world. Nearly a quarter of Russia's population has graduated from tertiary education (aka college), and the population is extremely literate.¹¹⁰ Although Russian print and television are very restrictive, Putin's regime has not instituted the same level of censorship as China, and internet access remains open to content from the outside.

Russia is a multiethnic state, but Russians themselves make up just over 80% of the population. A little over 40% of the population is Russian Orthodox, and a little under 40% of the population is some form of atheist or agnostic, while the rest of the population believes in a variety of minority faiths.

A Resource Economy

Natural resources are the essential backbone of Russia; they make up over 60% of its GDP and most if not all of the oligarchs have their wealth tied to or built from the extraction, transportation, and storage of these resources.¹¹¹ The price of oil is a direct determinant of the status of the Russian economy, and this means that Russia is reliant on foreign trade for both domestic stability and growth. Putin has successfully ensured that all of those rich oil reserves are mined, transported, and sold by Russian corporations, but the fact remains that the market for this amount of oil doesn't exist in Russia, it exists in Europe.

¹¹⁰ Roser, Max, and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina. "Tertiary education." Our World in Data (2013).

¹¹¹ The Moscow Times, www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/03/14/russias-natural-resources-valued-at-60-of-gdp-a64800. (retrieved September 3, 2021).

Natural gas plays a more important role in geopolitics. Unlike oil, which can easily be transported overseas or overland, natural gas must be transported via pipelines. On land, this means crossing through Ukraine, which has been a problem for the Russian government - if they raise natural gas prices too high for Ukrainian corporations, then they can simply illegally drill into the pipeline itself, and take the natural gas. This deprives the much better paying Central and Southern Europeans of their natural gas, and sends the whole economy of Russia spiraling.¹¹² The solution is to build around Ukraine, with expensive undersea pipelines, which Russia has funded in the form of Nord Stream, a pipeline running through the Baltic Sea, straight to Germany. Unfortunately, this new pipeline has a much lower capacity and further work must be done before Russia can end its dependence on the Ukrainian pipelines.¹¹³

Despite Russia's reliance on this international trade, it weathered the 2008 recession better than most countries, including the Europeans on whom it depends. Oil prices were so high during the early 2000s that Putin was able to save a significant capital reserve, a conservative economic policy that turned out well when the crisis came. The Kremlin was able to pump that money back into the economy, keeping businesses afloat even when the rest of the world was crashing.¹¹⁴

But now, oil prices are stagnant. Oil shocks from the conflict in the Middle East have led to pricing inefficiencies, while the recession continues to cripple the EU. Today, Russia has no "rainy day fund," and if another crisis arrives, it might take the whole country with it.

Questions to Consider

1. What role should the oligarchs play in Russian society? Are they international investors, political statesmen, mafia bosses, or some combination?
2. How can Russia stabilize its growth? Should the oligarchs be contributing to the nation or are there better ways that the national structure can benefit the oligarchs?
3. Can and should Russia diversify its economy? How can Russia best use its natural resources to serve its interests or that of the oligarchs?
4. How can the oligarchs keep public opinion of the Kremlin high? How can they reduce opposition?

¹¹² "Russia to Cut Ukraine Gas Supply." BBC News. BBC, January 5, 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7812368.stm>.

¹¹³ "Controversial Project Launched : Merkel and Medvedev OPEN Baltic Gas Pipeline." DER SPIEGEL. DER SPIEGEL, November 8, 2011. <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/controversial-project-launched-merkel-and-medvedev-open-baltic-gas-pipeline-a-796611.html>.

¹¹⁴ Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin* (Vintage Books, 2016), 355-356.

5. How should Russia project force abroad? Does international multilateralism still have a place in Russian strategy?
6. Should the current balance of power within the Kremlin remain in place? Can Putin continue to rule unopposed with the wealth of the oligarchy based on his power or can the oligarchs find alternative ways to shore up their bases?
7. What should be the Russian response to Ukraine's increasing shift toward the EU? What implications does this have for the future of Russian defense and trade?
8. What should the Russian response to increasing violence in Syria be? What consequences does this have for Russian defense and political projection?

Domestic Affairs Timeline

June 1991 - Boris Yeltsin is elected President of the Russian SFSR

August 1991 - High-ranking officials attempt a coup to replace Gorbachev with a new head of the USSR, and fail after a refusal of the military to comply with their orders (known as the putsch in Russia)

December 1991 - The Supreme Soviet confirms the dissolution of the USSR

October 1992 - Voucher Privatization begins as a part of "Shock Therapy"

September-December 1993 - Yeltsin dissolves the Parliament, and the Parliament impeaches him attempting to declare a new President of Russia. The army occupies the Parliament at Yeltsin's behest and Yeltsin passes a new constitution by referendum vastly increasing the power of the Presidency

August 16, 1999 - The Parliament confirms the appointment of Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister

August 26, 1999 - Putin orders the bombing of Chechnya in response to Chechen forces aiding an independence group in Dagestan in days prior, setting off the Second Chechen War

September 1999 - Russian apartments are bombed in several cities, in attacks attributed to Chechen terrorists

December 1999 - Yeltsin resigns on New Year's Eve, naming Prime Minister Putin as Acting President

March 2000 - Putin wins the Presidential election with 53% of the vote

October 2000 - Boris Berezovsky is put under investigation for fraud, directly following his media organization's negative coverage of Putin, and Berezovsky enters exile

October 2003 - Michael Khodorkovsky is arrested on charges of fraud and tax evasion, beginning Putin's crackdown on the Yelstin-era oligarchs

March 2004 - Putin wins re-election with 71% of the vote

December 2007 - The Great Recession begins, slowing economic growth in Russia

January 2009 - Following Russian accusations of Ukrainian corporations siphoning gas from Russian pipelines, the state-owned corporation Gazprom shuts off natural gas flows through Ukraine, stopping all natural gas from entering Southeastern Europe

November 2011 - Nord Stream 1 is inaugurated, beginning the flow of natural gas through the Baltic Sea to Germany

December 2011 - 6,000 people gather in Moscow against election fraud during the parliamentary elections, in the largest protest since the collapse of the USSR

September 2013 - Alexei Navalny wins 27% of the vote in the race for the mayoralty of Moscow, far above expert predictions

February 7-23, 2014 - Sochi Winter Olympics are held at great expense to the Russian state, paying Putin's oligarchs to build much of the vast infrastructure in Sochi

Foreign Affairs Timeline

(The blue is used for Ukrainian events, and the red is used for Syrian events).

August 1991 - Ukraine, alongside other Soviet republics, declares independence from the USSR.

December 2004 - The Orange Revolution begins in Ukraine in response to the presidential election of Viktor Yanukovich.

February 2010 - The reelection of Viktor Yanukovich is judged to be fair by international observers. Later, candidate Yulia Tymoshenko, who ran against him, is jailed for abuse of powers.

March 2011 - Protesters against the Assad regime begin to march in Damascus and Aleppo as part of larger protests during the Arab Spring. Security forces open fire on protestors, creating the initial seeds of an uprising.

April 2011 - The Syrian Army initiates a violent program of suppressing the protests, consisting of attacks on pro-uprising towns and resulting in hundreds of soldiers and civilians killed, as well as thousands detained.

July 2011 - The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is formed by Syrian Army defectors, with the single goal of removing Bashar al-Assad from power.

April 2012 - Kofi Annan, United Nations Envoy to Syria and former Secretary-General, attempts to mediate a ceasefire between the FSA and the Syrian Army. This ceasefire immediately fails as both sides resume hostilities.

May 2012 - Following a massacre of nearly 100 civilians by the Syrian Army, the FSA begins nationwide offenses against the Syrian Army, transforming the uprising into a full-fledged civil war.

June 2012 - The UN declares Syria to officially be in a state of civil war, as rebel forces begin advances to capture Damascus and Aleppo. Rebel forces capture major provinces in Idlib and Homs Governorate (provinces).

August 2012 - Following the collapse of the Syrian peace plan, Kofi Annan resigns from his position.

March 2013 - Rebels capture Raqqa, the largest city to date captured by rebel forces. Further clashes near Damascus continue as YPG and Islamist groups continue to clash near the north.

September 2013 - ISIL begins their attack on FSA forces, capturing a border village. Clashes between the FSA, Islamist organizations, and ISIL begins in the suburbs of Raqqa.

November 2013 - Yanukovich's government refuses to sign the EUUAA, sparking the first of the Euromaidan protests.

December 2013 - Euromaidan protests continue, with protestors occupying Kiev City Hall, and hundreds of thousands rallying in Maidan square.

January 2014 - ISIL officially captures their first city, Raqqa, and consolidates defensive positions around it.

January 2014 - Parliament passes restrictive anti-protests laws, while Euromaidan protestors begin to storm regional government offices. Parliament later rescinds the anti-protest law.

February 2014 - Continued clashes between Ukrainian protestors and police, as in one incident, 88 people were killed in 48 hours. Unknown snipers, likely affiliated with Russia, fire on protestors holding shields.

22 February 2014 - Yanukovich disappears to Kharkiv, while protestors take control of government buildings.

23 February 2014 - Oleksandr Turchynov becomes interim president, an arrest warrant is issued for Yanukovich, and Berkut is disbanded.

27 February 2014 - "Little Green Men" seize the main Ukrainian naval base and headquarters, key Ukrainian army bases, and Ukrainian government buildings in Crimea. They also take over the main entry/exits to Crimea, as well as the main airport.

1 March 2014 - Use of force in Ukraine is authorized by the Russian parliament. Putin now can take military actions in Ukraine for the goal of "protecting Russian interests".

Character List

1. **Igor Ivanovich Sechin** is the second most powerful man in Russia, after Putin. His background was in the intelligence service for the USSR, where he served in posts across East Africa. He served as Putin's chief of staff when Putin was Deputy Mayor of St. Petersburg and followed him to the Kremlin. He now leads Rosneft, the largest oil producer in Russia, and one of the two powerful Russian state-led oil conglomerates that have a stranglehold on the economy. He is considered the head of the siloviki, leveraging his experience in intelligence, espionage, and the military to promote his agenda, although he remains deeply loyal to Putin.

2. **Roman Arkadyevich Abramovich** is the 11th wealthiest man in Russia, the owner of the investment conglomerate Millhouse LLC, and one of Putin's closest confidants. Putin and Ambramovich have an incredibly close relationship, almost like that of a father and son, and Ambramovich is said to be the first person to promote Putin as Yeltsin's successor. His close partnership with Boris Berezovsky enabled him to take over the former-oligarch's assets when Berezovsky fled Russia. Ambramovich is famous as the largest charitable giver in Russia and was the governor of Chukotka throughout the 2000s.
3. **Alister Burkhanovich Usmanov** is the wealthiest man in Russia and an Uzbeki Russian-national media tycoon that owns much of the country's telecommunications industry, including Kommersant publishing house and newspaper, the second largest telephone operator MegaFon, and the largest internet company in the Russian-speaking world Mail.ru. Usmanov made his fortune through mining investments and owns Metalloinvest. His consolidation of Russian media was a product of Putin's intervention into the industry following poor press coverage of his administration. Usmanov's role in the media, although an invention of Putin, has not ingratiated himself into the innermost circles of advisors.
4. **Gennady Nikolayevich Timchenko** is the 6th wealthiest man in Russia, and the founder of both Gunvor and the Volga Group, conglomerates with investments across Russia, particularly in oil. He was an investor in St. Petersburg during Putin's time in the Mayor's office, and followed Putin's ascension. By 2008, Timchenko's companies handled contracts for nearly a third of Russia's oil exports, and although he publicly claims he has only a passing acquaintance with Putin, he is considered one of his oldest followers.
5. **Vladimir Yakunin** is the head of Russian Railways, often called Russia's third monopoly after oil and natural gas. He was one of the investors from St. Petersburg that Putin befriended in the 1990s, and is close with Yuri Kovalchuk, as the two men have been longtime coinvestors in Rossiya Bank. Yakunin's investments in Libya were a major factor in Putin's decision to support Muhammad Gaddafi. Yakunin is a devout member of the Orthodox church and supports institutions that spread traditional Russian culture, specifically in opposition to Western values.
6. **Arkady Romanovich Rotenberg** is Putin's oldest friend, having met in fifth grade at a Judo Club. He controls Rosspiritprom, the Russian state vodka company as well as SMP Bank through which he handles a number of pipeline projects for the Russian state, including the North Stream pipeline. He also managed several major projects for the Sochi 2014 Olympics, although it has been alleged that the prices his company charged exceeded those for the much larger North Stream. He is in business with his brother Boris, who is also a close friend of Putin's. Publicly he states that his relationship with Putin is only one aspect of his success, but privately, Putin built the Rotenberg fortune from nothing.

7. **Vladimir Olegovich Potanin** is the 8th wealthiest man in Russia, and one of the oldest of the oligarchs. He made his fortune during the “Shock Therapy” days of the Yeltsin administration, buying up majority shareholdings in previously public corporations using knowledge from his time at the Ministry of Foreign Trade. He owns 34% of Norilsk Nickel, a palladium and nickel mining and smelting company. Although he has paid his dues to Putin, they do not have a close relationship.
8. **Alexei Miller** is the Chief Executive of Gazprom, one of the two competing Russian state-led oil conglomerates that have a stranglehold on the economy. Miller was an economist in St. Petersburg who served with Putin as an aide to Mayor Sobchak in the 1990s. He led Putin’s march to buy back large shares of the oil industry, and is valued by Putin for his loyalty. He and Igor Sechin have traditionally been rivals as leaders of separate oil companies, which is an arrangement that Sechin personally engineered. Miller lacks the military strength of the siloviki, but his history with Putin and his position at Gazprom make him a powerful oligarch.
9. **Yuri Kovalchuk** is the chairman of Bank Rossiya, the institution where Putin is reputed to store his money, and where many of the oligarchs finance their ventures. He was a physicist in St. Petersburg, prior to becoming a major investor in city projects where he became a personal friend of both Putin and Vladimir Yakunin. Kovalchuk and Yakunin have remained business partners since they took over Bank Rossiya together. Under Kovalchuk’s leadership, Bank Rossiya purchased nearly half of the state-owned Gazprom’s insurance arm Sogaz in 2004, at well below market price (almost certainly at Putin’s behest). This began a series of expansions including the purchase of much of Gazprom’s media arm for \$166 million, which Dmitry Medvedev valued two years later at \$7.5 billion.
10. **Sergei Ivanov** is the Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of Vladimir Putin and a member of the siloviki, those oligarchs who leverage their military and intelligence backgrounds to accomplish their aims. Ivanov and Putin met in St. Petersburg as fellow KGB officers, and Ivanov went on to work under Putin during Putin’s time as the head of the FSB, the KGB’s successor organization. He holds a special place among the oligarchs, as he is less absurdly wealthy, but he can use a great deal of Russia’s security forces and he has Putin’s ear on matters of state, in particular.
11. **Viktor Ivanov** is the head of Russia’s Federal Narcotics Service, and another member of the siloviki, oligarchs who use their background in the military and intelligence services. Ivanov knows Putin from his time in the KGB, and later when he served as an aide for St. Petersburg Mayor Sobchak with Putin in the 90s. Ivanov followed Putin to the Kremlin, and was referred to as Putin’s “Great Inquisitor.” He has close ties to the Bratva, Russia’s largest criminal organization. He is also the leading board member of Almaz-Antey, the world’s 8th largest defense contractor.
12. **Mikhail Fridman** is the 2nd richest man in Russia and one of the co-founders of Alfa-Group, an international conglomerate with investments in energy, transportation,

and banking, including Russia's largest bank, Alfa-Bank. He made his money as a member of those early oligarchs of the Yeltsin era, who bought up privatizing Russian industries as they came onto the market. Fridman and Putin are not particularly close, as his wealth was made outside of Putin's influence.

13. **Viktor Vekelsburg** is the 3rd richest man in Russia and the founder and owner of Renova Group, a Russian conglomerate which owns RUSAL, the world's largest aluminium producer. He made his wealth as a businessman in the later years of the Yeltsin era, after the first major companies had already been bought. In the 2000s he made deals with Alfa-Group, controlled by Mikhail Fridman to take over many foreign oil assets operating within Russia. Vekelsburg has many friends in the West, and although his relationship with Putin is thought to be stronger than many of the other older oligarchs, Vekelsburg has many more allies abroad than at home.
14. **Yelena Nikolayevna Baturina** is Russia's wealthiest woman. She is the President of Inteco, a Russian conglomerate with investments in construction projects across the country. Her husband Yury Luzhkov is the former Mayor of Moscow and she made her fortune in the 90s through contracts with the city. She and her husband have been accused of rampant nepotism and a strong connection with Solntsevo Bratva, Moscow's portion of the Russian mafia. She and Putin are not close.
15. **Vladimir Bogdanov** is a Russian oil baron, who was appointed President of Surgutneftegas, Russia's fourth largest oil company, in 1984. His corporation is famously secretive about its profits and shareholders, but Putin has said that Bogdanov "has the biggest bank." Bogdanov is frugal, and not within Putin's innermost circle.
16. **Yuri Gushchin** is the owner of Russia's largest candy company, United Confectioners. He made his fortune in the early 1990s as one of the first corporations to capitalize on the reforms made under Gorbachev and Yeltsin. He did not participate in the "Shock Therapy" privatizing like other oligarchs, because much of his infrastructure had already been established illicitly during the Soviet Era. His wealth is far removed from Putin, and the two men are not close. Gushchin also has some real estate holdings overseas, including hotels in Seychelles.
17. **Alexander Grigoryevich Abramov** is one of the two heads of Evraz, Russia's largest steel producer. He often works with Roman Abramovich, another large stakeholder in Evraz. He made his wealth in the late 90s and early 2000s, during the later years of privatization and during Putin's era. Abramov is not particularly close to Putin himself, but his connections with other oligarchs in the inner circle makes him powerful.
18. **Olego Vladimiroich Deripaska** is a Russian industrialist with a fortune tied to energy and mining. He is the founder of the industrial conglomerate Basic Element and the president of the energy corporation En+, having made his wealth through his founding of the largest aluminium company in the world RUSAL in coordination with Roman Abramovich. Deripaska is thought to have a very close relationship with Putin, but he was publicly lambasted by Putin for his mistreatment of workers following the

dissolution of much of his empire following the 2008 recession. He is much less powerful than he once was, and is cowed in the eyes of the public, but nonetheless extremely wealthy and influential.

19. **Yevgeny Viktorovich Prigozhin** is the owner of a large chain of restaurants and casinos, and is informally known as ‘Putin’s Chef,’ as he is the favored caterer for the Kremlin. He is also the owner of the Wagner Group, a Russian private military corporation that often engages in wars abroad. Prigozhin started out as a small-time businessman with a few casinos and restaurants across Russia, until he started making meals for Putin at the beginning of his first term in 2000. Ever since then, he has been extremely close to the President and has received many generous government contracts. His influence abroad and the scale of his military power make him a powerful member of the siloviki, despite his lack of military experience.
20. **Yevgeny (Eugene) Valentinovich Kaspersky** is the CEO of Kaspersky Lab, a cybersecurity company with contracts across the globe. He worked in the Ministry of Defense during the final days of the Soviet Union, and developed some skill in dealing with viruses. He founded a cybersecurity company as the USSR collapsed, which has become the most successful of its kind. He hires mostly Russian government intelligence experts to work in his business, and it is highly likely that Kaspersky software has some level of espionage hidden within its frameworks. Kaspersky is decently close to Putin, but he ranks among the siloviki with his background in defense.
21. **Vladimir Stefanovich Litvinenko** is an academic and businessman with stakes in Phosagro, a company formerly owned by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, acquired after Khodorkovsky’s downfall. Litvinenko was Putin’s rector in graduate school, and allegedly wrote the entirety of Putin’s thesis paper. He and Putin are very close, and Putin has built all of Litvinenko’s wealth from nothing.
22. **Sergey Chemezov** is the CEO of Rostec, a Russian state-owned defense corporation and Rosoboronexport, the legal successor to Soviet arms exportations, aka another defense company. Chemezov has a background in the KGB, and worked with Putin during his time in Dresden, East Germany. Chemezov followed Putin through St. Petersburg to the Kremlin and the two men are very close. Chemezov is a member of the siloviki and is very powerful.
23. **Aleksandr Torshin** is a Russian politician and oligarch with ties to the mob. He has access to money laundering overseas, especially in Spain where he has great influence with the Taganskaya gang. Torshin is seen as the primary interface between the oligarchs and the mob, although he is not the only one. Torshin also has substantial connections to American conservative organizations like the National Rifle Association (NRA).
24. **Oleg Viktorovich Boyko** is the chairman of Finstar Financial Group, an international private equity firm. He made his wealth in the late Yeltsin-era, and is known for his forward-thinking approach to business and the oligarchy. Finstar particularly favors micro investments abroad, usually in areas of the Global South that don’t usually have

access to standardized banking. Boyko does not have a close relationship with Putin, but his influence overseas could be leveraged to great effect.

25. **Andrey Igorevich Melnichenko** is a Russian industrialist and the main beneficiary of both the fertilizer producer Eurochem Group and the coal company SUEK. He made his wealth in the late 1990s by buying up the risky scraps of privatization at cheap prices and then merging assets into corporations to rehabilitate. Melnichenko and Putin are not close, but his wealth in a non-competitive industry makes his position stabler among the oligarchs.