

# CHRONICLES INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

## Putin's Gamble: Playing the Terrorist Card

by Denis Petrov

When Russian President Vladimir Putin called President Bush shortly after the September 11 terrorist attacks to express his solidarity, pundits East and West took this as a sign of what one American columnist called the coming “earthquake” in U.S.-Russia relations. Putin was aiming to shift his policy focus westward, away from his previous “Eurasianist” effort to use Moscow’s relations with Beijing, New Delhi, Tehran, and the Arab world to balance the “unipolar” nature of a U.S.-dominated post-Cold War world order. This political tectonic shift would potentially make Russia a full-fledged member of the Western world and radically alter the world’s political alignment from East-West to North-South. Historically Christian/European/Western First World states (plus Japan) would join with the historically Orthodox Second World Russia in an effort to fight off an aggressive Third World movement: “international terrorism,” the chosen weapon of resurgent Islam.

Such a realignment is unlikely. Last fall, however, it did seem possible that Russia could move closer to the West in cooperative efforts, making Moscow a “partner” if not a “friend,” and damping mutual hostility. Even though Washington has done little so far to satisfy the Kremlin’s hopes for a partnership—and has even taken a number of steps that have antagonized Moscow and animated Putin’s critics—it may not be too late to take advantage of the end of the Cold War to forge a new strategic relationship with Russia.

Moscow should no longer be considered a strategic enemy of the United States or the West. Still, it is important for Washington to understand what is happening within the Kremlin and why Putin so suddenly changed his political tack. If Putin’s motives, particularly those rooted in Russian domestic politics, were understood by American policymakers, Washington would have a clearer idea of the opportunities for—and limitations of—future cooperation.

In the spring of 1999, the Yeltsin “clan,” also known as the “family”—the loosely knit network of Kremlin courtiers, Yeltsin relatives, oligarchs, gangsters, and media magnates—was desperately looking for a successor to Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin himself was in declining health, slipping in and out of an alcoholic stupor, while family enemies were sensing blood in the water. The task was not easy: The Kremlin entourage had to find a candidate who could not only attract the support of Russia’s elites and the country’s electorate but guarantee the safety and well-being of the family in years to come, as well as the stability of the post-communist order Yeltsin and company had built.

As far back as 1996, “Oligarch Number One” Boris Berezovsky was conducting a talent search, hunting far and wide for a potential successor to the “father of Russian democracy.” Yeltsin was engaged in an electoral fight for his political life, a

struggle that nearly killed him. (Yeltsin suffered a heart attack during the campaign, which was kept secret at the time.)

At this pivotal moment, Aleksandr Ivanovich Lebed stepped onto the political scene. The populist former Airborne Forces general was a charismatic straight-talker who projected a physical presence that rivaled Yeltsin’s. With Communist candidate Gennadi Zyuganov gaining in the polls and Yeltsin adopting “patriotic” rhetoric to attract potential voters from the nationalist-communist coalition, Berezovsky and Kremlin Chief of Staff Anatoli Chubays spotted Lebed as the potential spoiler and began financing his campaign. Eventually, the family was able to stuff enough ballot boxes and pour enough illicit funds into the right hands to peel enough votes away from Zyuganov to win Yeltsin a second term.

Lebed, named secretary of the Russian Security Council as payment for his electoral help, did not last long in the family-led Kremlin: Berezovsky, Chubays, and Yeltsin had eyed Lebed as a possible presidential successor, but the veteran of the Soviet war in Afghanistan proved too independent for the family’s tastes, and he was fired in the fall of 1996.

What Yeltsin and company did gain from the Lebed episode, however, was insight into what the Russian public, as well as Russian elites, might want in Yeltsin’s successor. Lebed’s military background and promises to impose order on chaotic post-communist Russia went over well with Russians weary of the family’s antics, crime, and general social decay. His tough-guy image and fondness for folksy aphorisms, as well as his laconic manner and reputation for honesty, seemed to fit the bill. More to the point, Russia’s oligarchs and regional bosses had decided that “Yeltsinism” needed to be reined in: The battles between the oligarchs and their allied organized-crime bosses had grown too risky and bloody. Berezovsky himself had been targeted by assassins. If the family’s “gray cardinal”—who narrowly escaped death when his car, not to mention his bodyguard, was blown to bits in the center of Moscow—was not safe, then no one was. A certain amount of order—a regularization of the “oligarchic system”—was needed. Some even dreamed of a Russian Pinochet, a role Chubays and Berezovsky seemed to want Lebed to play.

The talent search continued over the next three years, with one-time border troops commander Andrei Nikolayev and former interior minister Sergei Stepashin among the candidates. Stepashin was eventually named premier, a step some took as a sign that the family intended to use the premiership as a springboard to the presidency; but Stepashin, too, was dismissed.

Between the fall of 1998 and the spring of 1999, the family took a shine to Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, a protégé of St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoli Sobchak and Kremlin property manager Pavel Borodin. Putin, a former Soviet KGB officer, was eventually elevated over many of his peers and made chief of the Federal Security Service (FSB). Though the diminutive Putin lacked Lebed’s physical presence, his tough-guy de-

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*Denis Petrov, who frequently visits Russia, was reportedly never considered for the presidency of Russia.*

meanor and background as a member of what Russians call the "special services" matched the image the Kremlin wanted to cultivate for a potential successor. Putin also had a reputation as an economic liberal from his days as a deputy to Sobchak and, more importantly, was known for his loyalty to his patrons, a quality in short supply among members of Russia's elite.

With the family's enemies rallying around the banner of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and former premier Yevgeni Primakov, Yeltsin in and out of the hospital, and parliamentary elections set for December 1999, the family's political operatives hatched what came to be known inside the Moscow Ring Road as "Operation Putin." The masterminds of Operation Putin were likely Berezovsky and Kremlin Chief of Staff Aleksandr Voloshin. Together, they quickly garnered support from Russian elites for the formation of a new political party, Unity, and began a smear campaign in Russian media, targeting Luzhkov in particular.

The rest, as they say, is history: Using the invasion of Dagestan by Chechen rebels that summer and the subsequent bombing of apartment buildings in Moscow and southern Russia to maximum effect, the Kremlin spin doctors cast Putin, now elevated to the premiership, as the hard-boiled "special services" strongman who would defeat the insurgents and restore order to the chaotic Russian Fatherland. Not surprisingly, Putin endorsed Unity in the parliamentary elections. The combination of the media war on the Luzhkov-Primakov coalition and the burnishing of Putin's image, together with the newly minted premier's promises to Russia's oligarchs not to carry out a "review of privatization" (that is, to oversee yet another rough-and-tumble "redivision of property," as Primakov and Luzhkov were insisting on), propelled Unity to victory and opened the door to the grand finale of "Operation Putin," Yeltsin's dramatic announcement on December 31, 1999, that he would retire early, leaving Putin as acting president. Putin won election in March 2000, and the post-Yeltsin era, so some thought, had begun.

Yeltsin, however, was not about to go away. President Putin made frequent visits to the former president's *dacha* outside Moscow, reportedly to ask Yeltsin's advice on personnel matters. The word in Moscow was that Putin had made a deal with Yeltsin and his daughter and chief advisor, Tatyana Dychenko, that certain ministers and members of the presidential staff would not be replaced without the family's permission. Some said the deal was to last one year, others said two. Whatever the case, it became apparent early in Putin's presidency that he was hostage to the elite "clans" that had backed him as Yeltsin's successor. Putin, for instance, was forced to withdraw the candidacy of fellow St. Petersburg Dmitri Kozak for the post of general prosecutor, replacing him with a family-backed candidate. The "power structures," the defense and security apparatus that backed Putin's decision to mount a full-scale military operation in Chechnya in the fall of 1999, also appeared to buck the wishes of the nominal commander-in-chief on occasion.

Rumors that Putin was being blackmailed persisted in Moscow: Stories that the president's alleged taste for young men had supposedly been captured on videotape by Kremlin intriguers circulated in elite circles. Berezovsky, now out of favor in the Kremlin and attempting to ensure his own safety, sometimes dropped hints that he had proof of the family's involvement in the fall 1999 terrorist attacks that helped propel Putin to the presidency. Proof of either rumor could have de-

stroyed Putin politically.

Putin's abrupt reversal of an east-focused foreign policy seems to have been rooted in his desire to break out of the box the clans, particularly the family, have kept him in since his appointment as premier more than two years ago. Putin apparently realized that the September 11 terrorist attacks, and Washington's response to them, justified Russia's war in Chechnya, which, in turn, justified his own presidency. The opportunities were too good to pass up: By cooperating with Washington's "war on terrorism," Putin put an end to rumored plans by Berezovsky, some regional elites, and disgruntled military and security officers to mount an opposition to the Russian president or even remove him from office. Any attempts to blackmail Putin by bringing up the September 1999 terrorist bombings would henceforth die on the vine, as a significant portion of the country's elites, earlier concerned about Russia being labeled a pariah state, adopted more or less pro-Western views, trumpeting them in the national media. Furthermore, the Yeltsin family would find Putin elevated to the status of U.S. partner and, thus, more difficult to influence. In fact, last November, Russian law-enforcement agencies, following Putin's lead, mounted a series of raids on firms and ministries controlled by some of the most prominent Yeltsin-era oligarchs and apparatchiks, gathering *kompromat* (compromising material) on and opening criminal cases against Berezovsky (now living abroad), Transport Minister Aksenenko (who has since resigned), Customs Committee Chief Vanin, and State Emergencies Minister Shoygu, even as Putin's St. Petersburg cronies gradually began displacing old guard "Yeltsinoids" in the state apparatus. Even Voloshin, head of the Presidential Administration and the most influential family-era operative in the Kremlin, was threatened with criminal investigation.

Putin has played the terrorist card in a game that has both domestic and international-geopolitical facets. He is gambling that the concessions he hopes to gain from the Bush administration at the upcoming Moscow summit (set for May) will be enough to placate opposition in the military-industrial complex; that the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan will prove successful, eliminating a dire threat to Russian security; and that his enhanced stature as a world leader will ensure his political security, as well as provide opportunities for Russia's oligarchs to profit as economic cooperation with the West deepens, particularly in the oil-and-gas sector. (Russia has cast itself as a more reliable trade partner than the Arab-dominated OPEC countries.)

If he is wrong—if the American campaign falters; if Central Asia and the Caucasus sink further into chaos; if Islamic radicalism makes further inroads in Russia; if the Bush administration, which has so far failed to respond to Putin's moves with concessions of its own and has embarrassed Putin by its blatant disregard of Russian interests, continues its aggressive line; or if the West is far less cordial toward Russia's oligarchs than it currently seems—then his stint as Russian president could conceivably be shorter than expected. Thus far, Russian elites have not appeared to be searching for a Putin substitute, but the balance of forces in Russian politics, as Gennadi Zyuganov could testify, can shift quickly.

How, then, should Washington respond to Putin's initiatives? So far, by abrogating the ABM treaty, continuing plans to expand NATO, sending military advisors to Georgia, strengthening ties with the Central Asia regimes, and resuming its criticism of Moscow's Chechen campaign, the Bush administration

has shown little inclination to satisfy the Kremlin's hopes. Nevertheless, Russian cooperation in the immediate struggle with the Taliban and Al Qaeda has continued, and Putin apparently hopes that his friendly stance will prompt Washington to reciprocate.

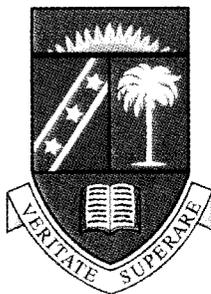
President Bush should avoid the temptation to personalize America's relationship with Russia. Putin is not acting out of altruistic motives, nor is the Russian leader a man about whom President Bush should harbor any illusions. Vladimir Putin was installed by the thugs, killers, gangsters, and corrupt apparatchiks who make up the "oligarchy." He has shown no inclination to change that system. Should St. Petersburgers and intimates of Putin displace key Yeltsin-era operatives, it is very likely that this changing of the guard would merely mean that a new bunch of thugs, killers, gangsters, and corrupt apparatchiks had replaced the old. We cannot, therefore, expect anything more than limited cooperation with Putin's Kremlin, regardless of which clan wins the struggle. It is improbable, for example, that Moscow will ever be very cooperative in international efforts to roll up terrorist-connected financial networks, since Russian organized crime has been involved in terrorism-related money-laundering, drug trafficking, and arms sales. Putin himself has personal ties to Russian mobsters, particularly in his native St. Petersburg.

Nevertheless, the United States can and should deal with Russia on those matters of strategic importance enumerated above. Thus far, however, Washington has done nothing but humiliate Moscow, causing even friendly observers to question the wisdom of the Kremlin's crucial aid to America's "war on terrorism" in Afghanistan. Washington's stance, perceived as outright arrogance by Moscow, has only fanned the flames of

anti-Americanism in Russia and, probably, around the world. The Bush administration could do much to dampen anti-American hostility by, for instance, halting its aggressive and wholly unnecessary efforts to expand NATO eastward, a low-cost move that would help ensure continuing Russian cooperation in Afghanistan.

That is not to say that the Bush administration should give Putin's Kremlin everything it wants. There are some things the White House should deny the Kremlin: An open door for Russian immigration and travel, for instance, has merely acted as a way for organized crime from the former Soviet Union to spread its tentacles around the globe. The same Russian "businessmen" who are reportedly buying gas stations in the United States have forged partnerships with mafia drug-runners and white slavers based in Russia and Eastern Europe. Their influence in America represents a danger to U.S. security and should be treated as such.

A clearheaded and realistic American policy toward Russia would recognize the critical importance of a mutually advantageous partnership with Russia without falling into the trap of personalizing relations with Moscow: Putin can be a partner on a limited basis. He is not, and cannot be, a friend, and he is not the personification of fledgling Russian democracy or economic reform. U.S. leaders should never base any policy on misguided attempts to "help our friend," as past administrations mistakenly did with both Gorbachev and Yeltsin. In short, Washington should view its mutual relations with Russia—and all foreign states—through the prism of American national-security interests. The United States must inevitably deal with unsavory regimes, as it has so often in the past. These relations should not be viewed as anything more than marriages of convenience.



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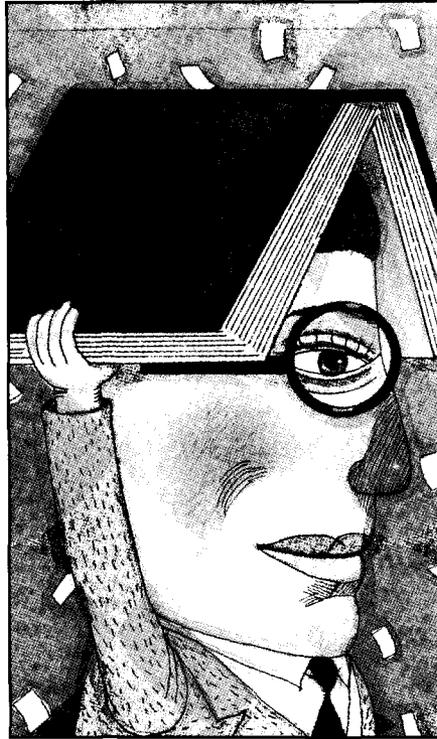
# This Is Conservatism?

by Tobias Lanz

*"Isn't it pretty to think so?"*

—Ernest Hemingway

**A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism**  
by Jonathan M. Schoenwald  
New York: Oxford University Press;  
338 pp., \$35.00



Paul Keresley

There are two fictions that most American conservatives have taken to heart. First, that the Republican Party stands for conservative ideas and principles; second, that there has been a conservative renaissance in the last several decades, a resurgence that culminated with the Reagan presidency and continues into the present. These two false premises form the foundation of Jonathan Schoenwald's *A Time for Choosing*. Schoenwald examines the rise of the conservative movement since World War II and argues that, by the early 1960's, it had articulated a political agenda and created an organizational structure that would eventually make it the dominant force in American politics. What this book, like most that chronicle the history of American conservatism, fails to recognize is that conservatism is far more than a political movement: It encompasses economic, social, cultural, and theological questions. These aspects of conservatism are thoroughly omitted

*Tobias Lanz teaches politics at the University of South Carolina, Columbia.*

from Schoenwald's analysis. His book reads like a piece of Whig history, a tract that showcases prominent personalities, competing factions, and powerful organizations that created a political movement to compete against liberalism. Yet the conservatism that Schoenwald describes could never really replace liberalism, because it is steeped in all of the progressive assumptions of its supposed nemesis.

Schoenwald employs a natural growth metaphor to describe the history of the movement. To him, modern conservatism was born in the 1950's, struggled to create its identity in the 60's, and finally reached maturity in the late 70's. He identifies three distinct but overlapping strands of thought that gave rise to the movement: traditionalism, libertarianism, and anticommunism. This foundation produced the two groups that led the assault on New Deal liberalism. Schoenwald describes the first as "mainstream" or "electoral" conservatism, which relied

on the electoral process and the Republican Party as its vehicles of power. The second group comprises the "extremist" conservatives who used private organizations to disseminate information and broaden the conservative electoral base. The goal of the former was to capture political institutions through which conservative laws and policies could be enacted; the latter sought to instigate a populist movement that would change the political and social climate of the nation. While the two groups pursued different strategies, they were united against the communist threat, the growth of big government, and social decay.

During the Cold War, "extremist" organizations such as the John Birch Society and the Conservative Society of America made significant headway early on. They were instrumental in shifting the GOP to the right, ensuring the nomination of Barry Goldwater as the Republican presidential candidate in 1964. Although Goldwater lost miserably, conservatives remained confident and energized. After all, Goldwater had managed to attract 27 million voters. More importantly, the party had been purged of overt liberalism. This newly conservative GOP began to focus on expanding its electoral base. But one obstacle remained—the "extremists." While many Americans agreed with conservative principles, they remained wary of this element within the Republican Party. Party leaders knew that the group presented an image prob-