

# SECURITY INSIGHTS



## *The Political Elite Under Putin* By Dmitry Gorenburg

### *Executive Summary*

- Russia's political elite has undergone relatively little change under Vladimir Putin's rule. Only sixty people have been ranked twentieth or higher at least once between 2000 and 2019 in the annual *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* list of the most politically influential Russians. Eighteen people have appeared on every list during this period. The greatest shift in elite composition occurred between 2007 and 2008, with smaller shifts around the presidential elections of 2004 and 2012.
- Most of the political elite originate in the government bureaucracy in Moscow or St. Petersburg or came to their positions of influence through personal ties to Vladimir Putin, either in St. Petersburg or in the security services. Only ten percent came to power through electoral politics; another ten percent are businessmen who made their money independently of any connections to Vladimir Putin.
- The elite is fairly evenly divided between individuals who have political influence solely because of their positions in government and individuals who have influence outside of their official role. People in the first group generally drop off the list quickly after leaving government or being demoted, and people in the second group tend to retain influence regardless of their position at any given time and remain influential for extended periods, even after departing government service.

### *Introduction*

For most of the post-Soviet period, the newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* has conducted a monthly survey of Russian political experts. This survey asks its respondents to rank the 100 most politically influential Russians in the previous month. Throughout this period, the newspaper has also published an annual ranking,<sup>1</sup> based on the average rank of those mentioned during the previous calendar year. These data can be used to identify the most politically influential members of the Russian elite during the twenty years of Vladimir Putin's rule.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent annual rankings were published in Dmitri Orlov, "100 ведущих политиков России в 2019 году," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 1, 2020, [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2020-01-13/7\\_7766\\_people.html](http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2020-01-13/7_7766_people.html).

<sup>2</sup> The question of how well an expert survey of this type reflects actual power dynamics in Russia is a valid one. Because the main goal of this study is to examine political influence, ratings by Russian experts on domestic politics

## *Characteristics of the Data Set*

The dataset used includes all individuals identified in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*'s survey who ranked at least twentieth at some point during the period from 2000 to 2019. Since the annual rankings run through 2019, they do not include changes in elite composition resulting from the government reshuffle that took place in January 2020. Such changes will be reflected in the next annual ranking, which is expected to be published in early 2021. This group is composed of just sixty individuals. Although most of those named are politicians or senior government officials, eight are well-connected businessmen or executives of state corporations. Only six individuals came to power through electoral politics. Two are religious leaders. Only three are women. Almost all built their careers in Moscow or St. Petersburg, with only three originally coming from the regions.

The dataset shows each individual's average annual ranking if they were in the top 100 that year. In the graphs below, gaps indicate periods when the individual in question fell out of the top 100. The primary characteristic of the list is the extraordinary longevity of the people on it. Eighteen people have appeared in the top 100 every year from 2000 through 2019. Nine of them also appeared in the 1999 list, indicating that their political careers extend at least to the late Yeltsin period.<sup>3</sup> Only four people have returned to the top 100 after spending more than a year off the list.

Members of the Putin-era political elite can be characterized in various ways. Many analysts have divided them according to their background, as having emerged from the security services or from Vladimir Putin's circles in St. Petersburg or from private businesses established in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> Others have divided them according to the nature of their position.<sup>5</sup> These are very useful ways to categorize, therefore both background and position are mentioned in the discussion below. However, I take a different starting point and categorize the elite on the basis of when they attracted the notice of expert analysts of the Russian political scene as being influential in that scene. This undoubtedly creates some artifacts. Some individuals undoubtedly flew under the radar for some period of time before attracting the notice of experts. Most importantly, individuals who may be influential advisors to senior leaders but stay in the shadows may be undervalued or missed entirely. Nevertheless, given that the main goal of this study is to examine elite stability and change, a primary focus on the chronology of the subjects' appearance on the scene is more appropriate than one that puts the main focus on the subjects' background or role in the political system.

## *Survivors of the Yeltsin Era*

Ten members of the political elite can be characterized as long-term survivors of the Yeltsin era. These are individuals who have appeared on the list since at least 1999, which is the earliest year for which data is currently available. Strikingly, half of the group is still considered among the top thirty most politically influential people in Russia in 2019, twenty years later. This group of

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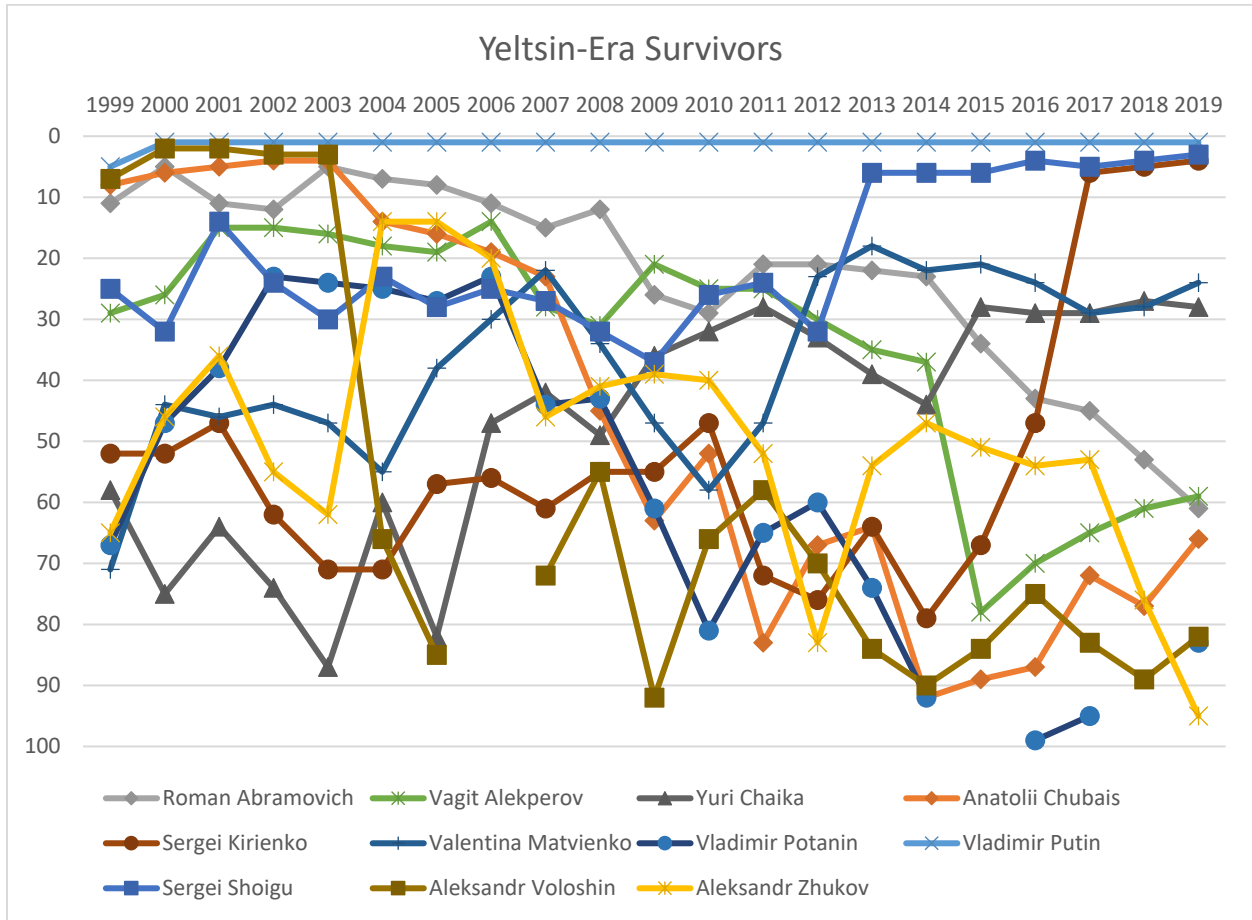
are likely to be a fairly accurate representation, especially because the survey used a consistent methodology throughout the period under study.

<sup>3</sup> "1999 год. 100 ведущих политиков России." <https://ru.telegram.one/CorruptionTV/1499>.

<sup>4</sup> Olga Kryshтанovskaya and Stephen White, "Putin's Militocracy," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 19(4):289-306, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Tatiana Stanovaуа, "Пять путинских элит на фоне транзита," Carnegie Moscow Center, February 27, 2020. <https://carnegie.ru/2020/02/27/ru-pub-81158>.

course includes Vladimir Putin, but also consummate political survivors such as Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu; First Deputy Chief of Staff, Sergei Kirienko; Chair of the Federation Council and former Governor of St. Petersburg Valentina Matvienko; and current Presidential Envoy of to the North Caucasus region and former Prosecutor General, Yuri Chaika. With the exception of Putin and Matvienko, these are people who have made careers as appointed senior officials rather than elected politicians.



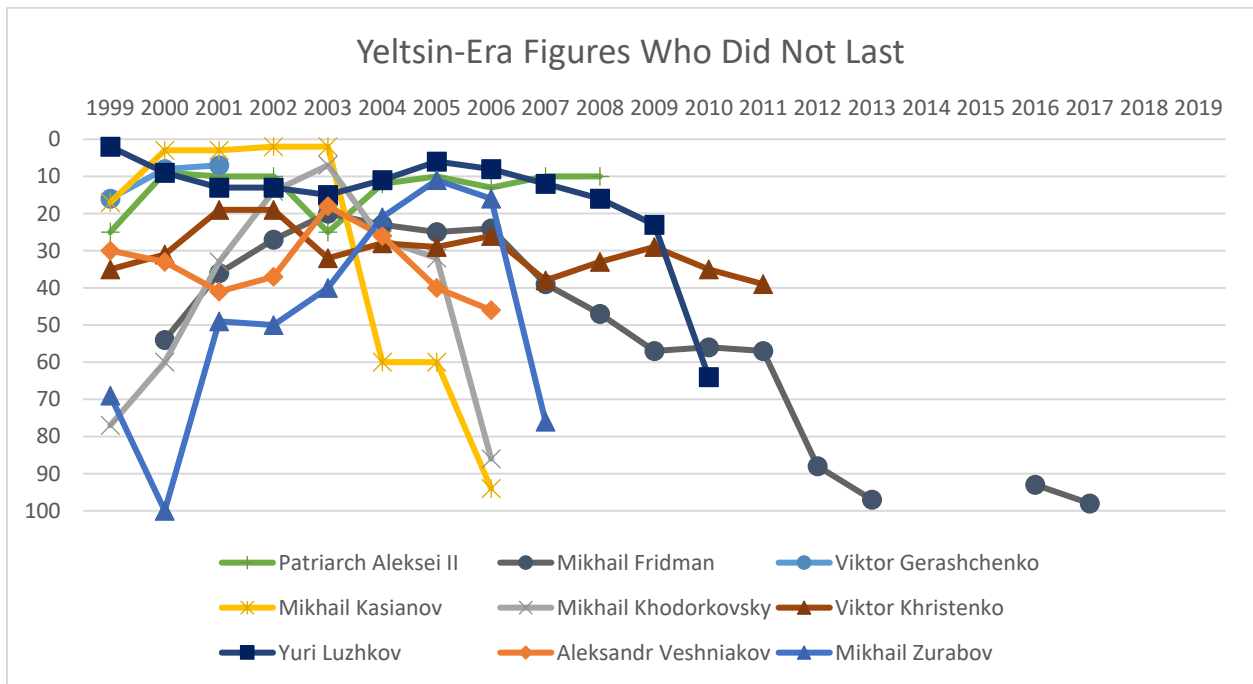
The group of survivors also includes a number of people who have made their careers primarily in the business world, including such prominent oligarchs as Roman Abramovich and Vagit Alekperov. Vladimir Potanin is also included in the graphic as an oligarch known for his ability to maneuver through changes in Russia's political scene and remain influential, although he is not part of the dataset, having never reached the top twenty in influence in any year measured. Although Anatolii Chubais was a prominent government official earlier in his career, during the period being analyzed here he has made his career in the world of state corporations, first as head of Russia's electricity monopoly and then as head of the Rosnanotech state corporation. All four of these individuals have seen a decline in their influence in recent years, reflecting a general decline in influence among oligarchs in favor of bureaucratic officials.

The two other members of this group deserve a brief mention. Aleksandr Zhukov is a survivor who has played a variety of roles in government, including as a leading member of the State Duma, as the head of the Russian Olympic committee that organized the Sochi Winter Olympics,

and as a deputy prime minister. Like the oligarchs, his influence has declined sharply in recent years. Finally, there is the case of Aleksandr Voloshin. Throughout Putin’s first term as President, Voloshin was the head of the presidential administration and considered one of the most powerful people in Russia. More interestingly, unlike other holdovers from the Yeltsin team described in the following section, he has consistently remained on the list of politically influential Russians since his resignation in 2003, albeit in relatively low positions.

***Yeltsin-Era Politicians Who Did Not Last***

A second group of members of the political elite were also survivors of the Yeltsin era, but have not retained their influence. These nine individuals are a fairly diverse group. Five of the nine were senior officials in the central government who stepped down at various points between 2001 and 2011 and thereafter disappeared from political life in Russia. These include Viktor Gerashchenko, who headed the Russian Central Bank until 2002; Aleksandr Veshniakov, who headed Russia’s Central Election Commission until 2007; and Mikhail Kasianov, who served as prime minister during Putin’s first term as president. There are also two former government ministers: Mikhail Zurabov, who headed the pension fund from 1999 to 2004 and was thereafter health minister until 2007 and Viktor Khristenko, who was deputy prime minister in both Yeltsin’s last year as president and in Putin’s first term and thereafter the minister of industry until 2012.



The other four members of this group can be described as more eclectic. Aleksei II’s influence came from his position as the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. As we will see below, after his death in 2008, his successor retained a roughly similar level of influence. Yuri Luzhkov rapidly lost influence after his removal from his post as mayor of Moscow in 2010. The two businessmen in this group had very different trajectories. Mikhail Khodorkovsky was, for a time, the most influential private businessman in Russia and remained influential even after his arrest in 2003, but he disappears from the list after his trial and imprisonment in 2005. Finally, Mikhail

Fridman is somewhat different from the rest of this group. He is a businessman whose influence has gradually faded over time. In this, he is most similar to Vladimir Potanin in the previous group (the “survivors”), with the main difference being that the degree of his fade has taken him out of not only the top twenty, but the top 100, in recent years. Other than Fridman, the members of this group are all notable for having derived their influence from their positions, rather than their personal power. Unlike several people in the survivor group, their influence did not outlast their dismissal from their government positions.

### *Putin’s Original Team*

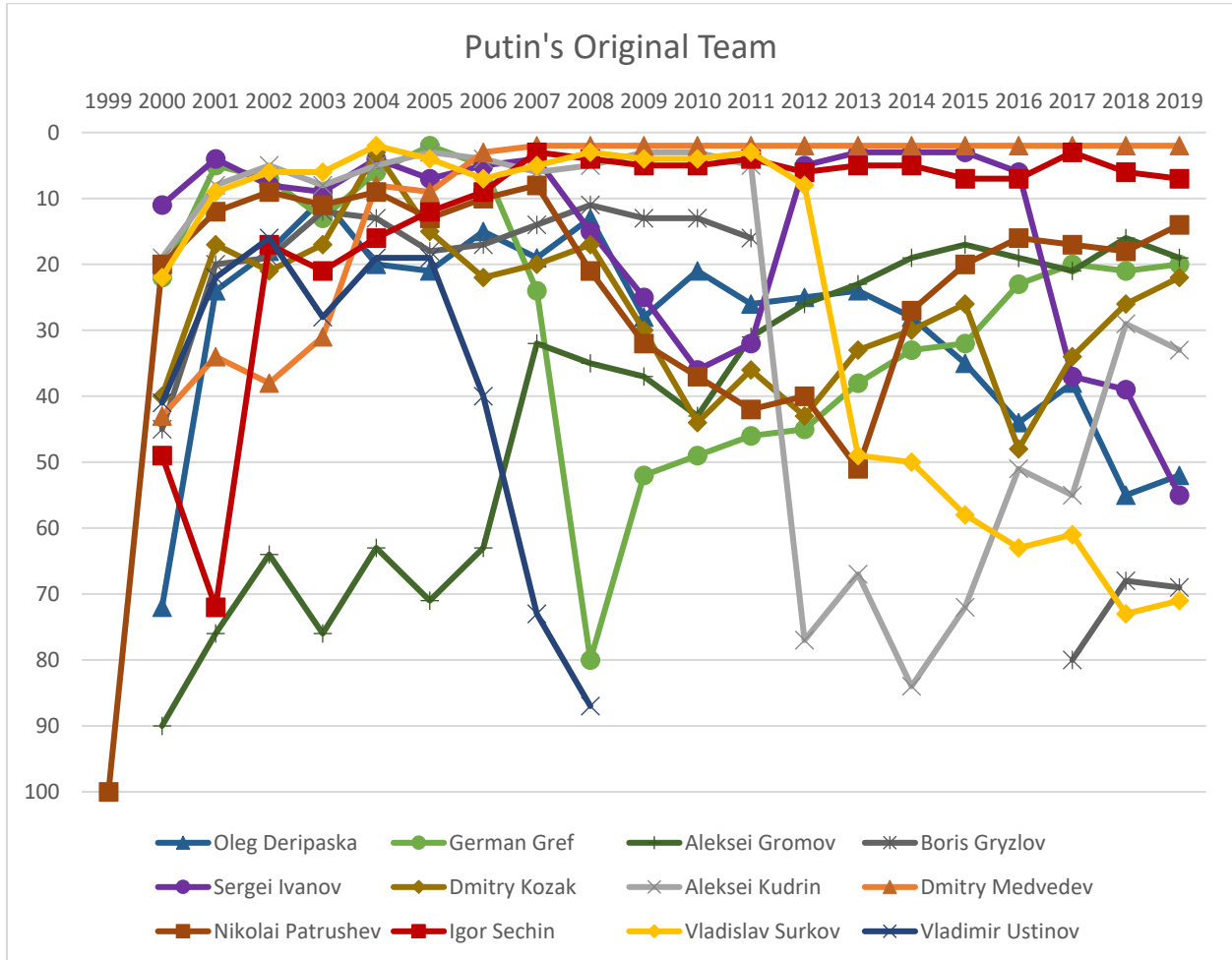
When Vladimir Putin became Russia’s president in 2000, he quickly installed his own team of loyalists. With only one exception, these twelve individuals who first appeared on the list in 2000 have remained highly influential players in Russian politics over the next twenty years. The majority of the team are connected to Putin, either through their work in the security services or from Putin’s time working in the St. Petersburg mayor’s office in the 1990s.

The security service contingent includes Sergei Ivanov, Igor Sechin, Nikolai Patrushev, and Vladimir Ustinov. The first three people on this list have been among the core members of Putin’s inner circle throughout his time in power. One key difference when compared with the group of individuals that did not last is that the security service contingent’s influence has remained high regardless of the various positions they have held. Thus, Igor Sechin has variously served as deputy head of the presidential administration, deputy prime minister (while Putin was prime minister), and head of the Rosneft state oil corporation. His influence did not decrease when he departed from his government position in 2012 and he remains one of the ten most politically influential people in Russia to the present day.

Similarly, Nikolai Patrushev has been highly influential, both as FSB director and as secretary of the Security Council, despite the latter organization’s relatively limited formal power. Sergei Ivanov was highly influential first as defense minister, then as deputy prime minister, and finally as head of the presidential administration. His influence has faded in the last three years after his departure from the presidential administration, but the fact that he remains on the list despite having virtually no significant official role in Russian politics speaks to his personal connection to the president. Vladimir Ustinov is a somewhat different case. Although he played a powerful role in Russian politics while serving as prosecutor general, his removal from that position in 2006 was interpreted as a political defeat and resulted in a sharp decline in his perceived influence, even while he was still serving as Minister of Justice. After his dismissal from that position in 2008 and his transfer to the role of presidential representative to the Southern Federal District, he disappeared from the rankings entirely.

The St. Petersburg team includes Dmitry Medvedev, Aleksei Kudrin, German Gref, Dmitry Kozak, and Boris Gryzlov. These are also figures who have exhibited political influence regardless of the position they held. Medvedev served variously as deputy head and then head of the presidential administration, first deputy prime minister, president, and prime minister, retaining a position among the ten most influential Russian political figures since his appointment as head of the presidential administration in late 2003. Gref and Kudrin survived their departures from positions as minister for economic development and trade and minister of finance, respectively. Gref has retained influence in his role as head of Sberbank, while Kudrin remained highly influential despite having no major government or business position from 2011

until his appointment as head of the Accounts Chamber in 2018. Boris Gryzlov was highly influential as minister of internal affairs and as speaker of the State Duma, but disappeared from the list after stepping down as speaker in 2011. He returned in 2017, however, despite having a fairly low-level position as the president's representative to the contact group on the Ukraine conflict.



Dmitry Kozak has held a wide variety of positions over the last twenty years, both in Moscow and in the regions, while remaining highly influential. His peak of influence was in Putin's first two terms in office, when he held senior positions in the presidential administration and as presidential representative to the Southern Federal District. Note that his high level of influence in the latter position contrasts with the case of Vladimir Ustinov, who dropped off the influence list after replacing Kozak in this position. This strongly suggests that Kozak's influence during this period was related to his personal connections, rather than the office he held.

Three other members of the team are not connected to Putin through prior service. Vladislav Surkov and Aleksei Gromov were already working in the central government in the 1990s but first rose to positions of prominence under Putin. Surkov served in the presidential administration until 2011, then briefly as head of the government executive office before becoming a personal advisor to Putin. Although his influence declined in the latter position and he is likely to drop out of the rankings entirely in 2020 after his very public resignation in

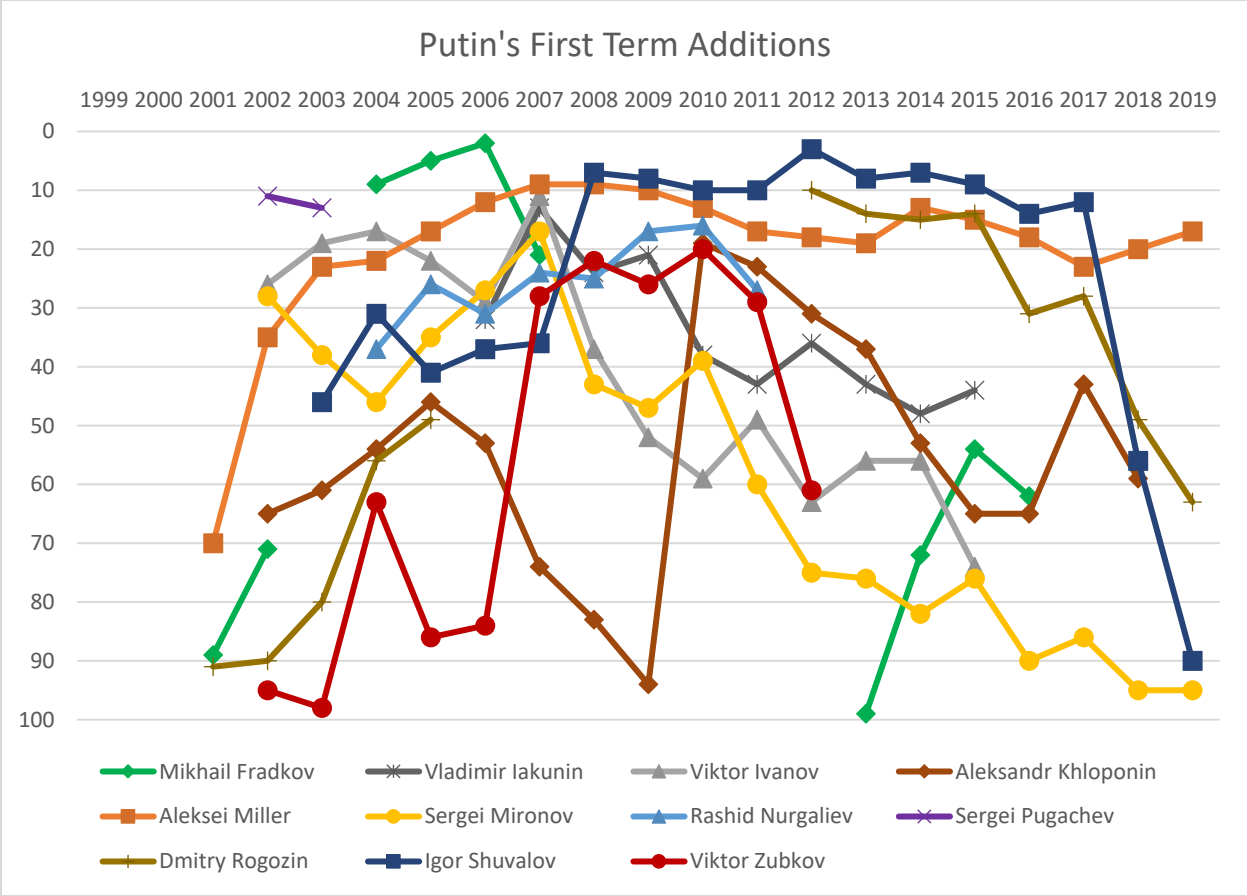
February, he remained on the list throughout the period of the study. Gromov was the president's press secretary in his first two terms, followed by twelve years in the presidential administration as deputy and first deputy chief of staff. His influence has steadily increased over the years, especially once he moved into the presidential administration. Finally, Oleg Deripaska is an outlier among this group, as his role is in business rather than government. Although he is linked more closely to Putin than some of the businessmen who appeared in the other groups, his influence has declined in the last decade as power has shifted away from people in business and toward government officials.

### *People Who Became Influential During Putin's First Term*

Individuals who joined the list of politically influential figures between 2001 and 2004 fall into very similar categories as Putin's original team. Once again, the majority are figures whose background is in the security services or in the St. Petersburg government, while a few rose through other channels. Unlike Putin's original team, few of these individuals have the political capital to have influence separate from their positions.

*Siloviki*, political figures who rose to power in the security services, such as Mikhail Fradkov, Rashid Nurgaliev, and Viktor Ivanov, are good examples of this tendency. Fradkov, for example, appeared in relatively low positions on the list as head of the tax police in 2001 and 2002, then disappeared from the list entirely while serving as Russia's representative to the European Union in 2003. He then spent four years as one of the most politically influential people in Russia while serving as prime minister, before again disappearing from the list entirely after losing that position. He returned to the list in 2013 while serving as head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, but disappeared after being dismissed from that position in 2016. Similarly, Rashid Nurgaliev was highly influential while serving as minister of internal affairs from 2004 to 2011, but disappeared from the list immediately after stepping down from that position. Viktor Ivanov spent several years as an assistant to President Putin and then several more as director of the Federal Narcotics Service. He disappeared from the list after being dismissed from the latter position in early 2016.

The political figures who came out of St. Petersburg are a relatively diverse group. Among them are two who have remained on the list throughout the period since their initial appearance in 2001–2002. Sergei Mironov served for many years as the speaker of the Federation Council, although he retained a certain amount of influence after moving to the State Duma in 2012. Aleksei Miller has remained among the twenty-five most politically influential Russians continuously since 2003 while serving as the head of Gazprom, Russia's natural gas monopoly. Vladimir Iakunin was on the list only during the period from 2005 to 2015, when he headed the Russian Railroad state corporation. His immediate disappearance after his departure from that position in 2015 suggests that his influence derived from his position, rather than his personal power. Viktor Zubkov first made the list while running the Financial Monitoring Committee and reached higher positions on it, having served as prime minister and first deputy prime minister. He dropped off the list after losing the latter position in 2012.



The remaining four people in this group have had highly varied careers. Igor Shuvalov has served in a variety of roles in the government, including as the government’s chief of staff, as an assistant to the president, and as first deputy prime minister. He was most highly ranked on *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*’s list in the latter period, although he retained some influence even after departing that position in 2018. Aleksandr Khloponin is one of the few people on the overall list who appeared on the list while holding a position outside of Moscow. He was, for many years, the governor of Krasnoyarsk Krai and then served as deputy prime minister. The peak of his influence was in the period 2010–2014, when he concurrently served as deputy prime minister and presidential envoy to the North Caucasus Federal District. Even during this period, his highest position in the survey was twentieth in 2010, highlighting the extent to which Moscow-based political figures dominate the rankings.

Dmitry Rogozin first came to prominence as one of the few elected national-level politicians on this list. He was one of the leaders of the right-wing Rodina party until 2005 and was thus one of the few influential politicians with an independent power base. However, he dropped off the list after departing the party due to conflicts with other leaders. He returned to a position of influence in 2012 after being appointed deputy prime minister in charge of the defense and space industries. Finally, Sergei Pugachev is unique, in that he only appeared on the list for two years, but in very high positions. He was a businessman with close ties to Putin, but quickly fell out of favor after refusing to reinvest his capital in Russia. He has since renounced his Russian citizenship and now lives in France.



## *People Who Became Influential During Putin's Second Term*

A fairly large group—thirteen people—became politically influential during Putin's second term. Although a few of these people appeared on the list early in the term, most joined or rose to high rankings in 2007 or 2008. Individuals who joined the political elite during this period fall into two major categories, with a few outliers.

Five people in this set had close ties with Putin, mostly dating to their schooling in the 1970s and 1980s or through working together in the security services in the 1980s and 1990s. All five of these individuals rose to highly influential positions at around the same time and have remained near the top of the list throughout Putin's presidency. Aleksandr Bastrykin was a university classmate of Putin. He worked at the Ministry of Justice and in the Prosecutor-General's office before being appointed in 2007 as head of the Investigative Committee (IC), an anti-corruption agency within the Prosecutor-General's office. His influence increased further in 2011, when the IC became an independent agency directly subordinate to the president.

Sergei Naryshkin has served in a variety of roles over the years, including chief of staff to the prime minister, deputy prime minister, head of the presidential administration, chair of the State Duma and, most recently, director of the Foreign Intelligence Service. His influence has always come less from his position and more from his close ties to Vladimir Putin, whom he has known since the early 1980s, when they studied together in the Soviet security service (KGB) schools in Leningrad. He was perceived as having been appointed head of the presidential administration under Dmitry Medvedev in order to ensure Medvedev's loyalty to Putin.<sup>6</sup> Aleksandr Bortnikov spent his entire career in the KGB or its successor agency, the Federal Security Service (FSB), primarily in the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) office. He was appointed deputy director of the FSB in 2004 and became its head in 2008. Although all three are influential because of their positions, they achieved these positions through a combination of their previous work and their connections to Vladimir Putin.

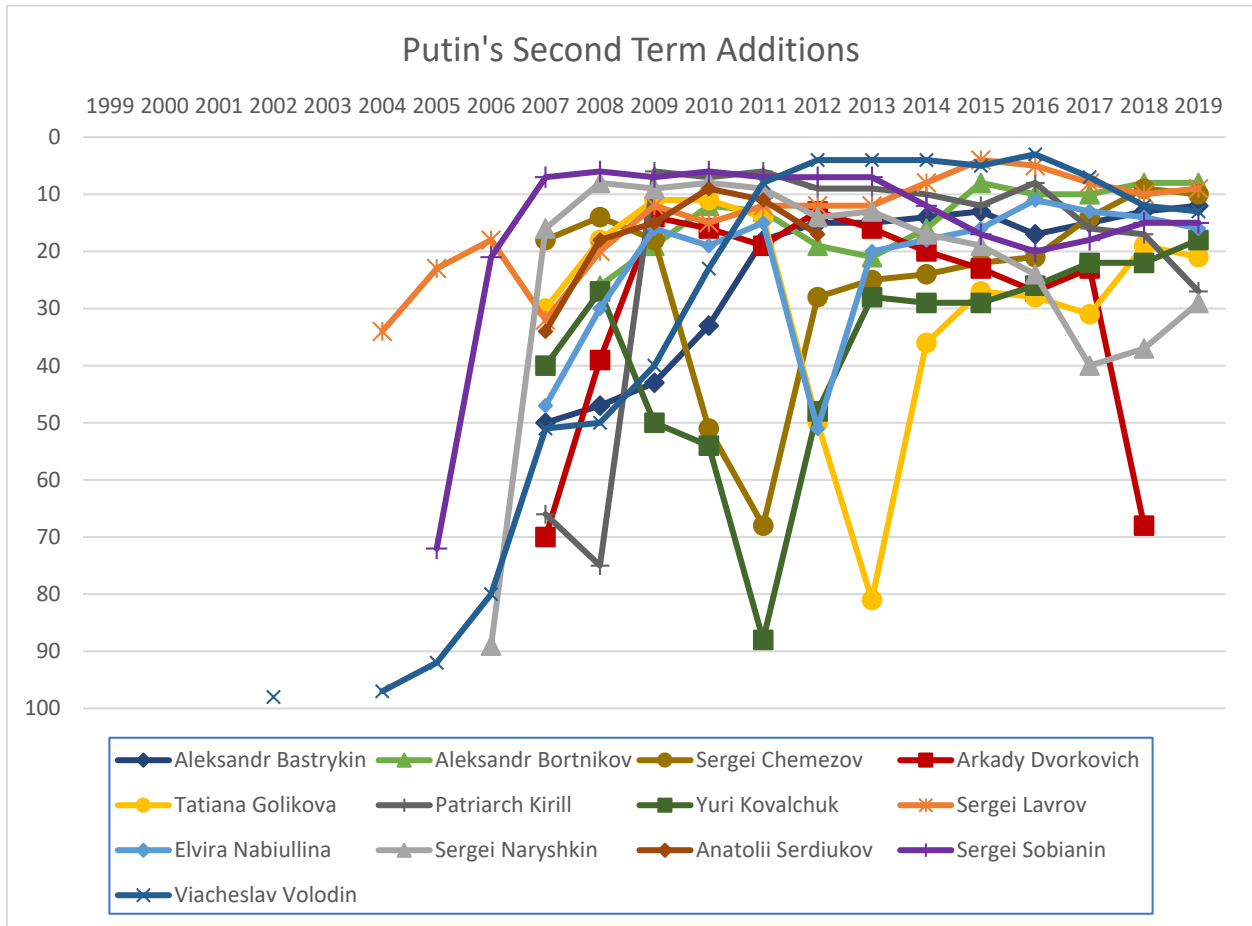
On the other hand, Sergei Chemezov and Yuri Kovalchuk have attained their positions almost entirely through their connections to Putin. Chemezov worked with Putin in the KGB in East Germany in the 1980s and again in the Presidential Property Office in Moscow in the late 1990s. Since Putin became president, Chemezov has held senior positions in a variety of state corporations, beginning with Rosoboronexport (the state defense export company) and since 2007 as general director of Rostec, which, under his leadership, has become the dominant player in Russia's defense industry. Although Yuri Kovalchuk did not go to school or work with Putin, he has had close ties to the president dating back to the 1990s. Like Chemezov, he has never worked in the Russian government, having instead used his personal ties to Putin to amass a large fortune as the head of Bank Rossiia, a position that has led him to be labeled as "Putin's personal banker."

A second set of five people rose to political influence by rising through the ranks of their agencies. Sergei Lavrov is perhaps the archetype of this figure. He has served as foreign minister since 2004, having previously served as a deputy foreign minister and as Russia's representative

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<sup>6</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, Michael Stott, "Medvedev's Kremlin chiefs are Putin men," Reuters, May 13, 2008. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-cabinet-kremlin/medvedevs-kremlin-chiefs-are-putin-men-idUSL1323497720080513>.

to the United Nations. Although he was, for many years, described as someone who is a civil servant and chief implementer rather than a member of Putin's inner circle, his longevity in his post has gradually translated into greater influence on decision-making.



Tatiana Golikova rose through the ranks of the Ministry of Finance, becoming Deputy Finance Minister in the late 1990s. She was then appointed as Minister of Health and Social Development in 2007, going from that role to the position of Chair of the Accounts Chamber in 2013 and then becoming Deputy Prime Minister for Social Policy in 2018. Similarly, Elvira Nabiullina rose through the ranks at the Ministry for Economic Development and Trade, becoming the head of the ministry in 2007. She has retained influence since transitioning to her current position as head of Russia's Central Bank in 2013.

Arkady Dvorkovich rose through the Finance Ministry and the Ministry for Economic Development, having developed close ties to German Gref in the latter ministry. He first rose to prominence as then-President Dmitry Medvedev's chief economic advisor and then as deputy prime minister once Medvedev assumed the position of Prime Minister in 2012. He dropped off the list of politically influential Russians after losing that position in 2018, and now serves as president of the World Chess Federation. Finally, Patriarch Kirill rose through the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church and headed the Church's Department for External Church Relations from 1989 until his election as Patriarch in 2009, following Patriarch Aleksei's death.

He first appeared on the list of influential people in 2007, when it became increasingly clear that he was likely to become the next patriarch, even as Aleksei's health was declining. All five of these individuals are influential because of their positions, rather than through personal ties.

Only two members of this group attained their positions through the political process, both initially in regions outside of Moscow. Sergei Sobianin has had a long career in electoral politics at the regional level, first winning election in 1991 as mayor of a small town in Siberia, gradually rising to higher positions in the region, including a five-year stint as governor of Tiumen. He moved to Moscow in 2005 to serve as head of the presidential administration, and has remained a fixture in the top twenty most influential Russians since 2007. He has been the mayor of Moscow since 2010.

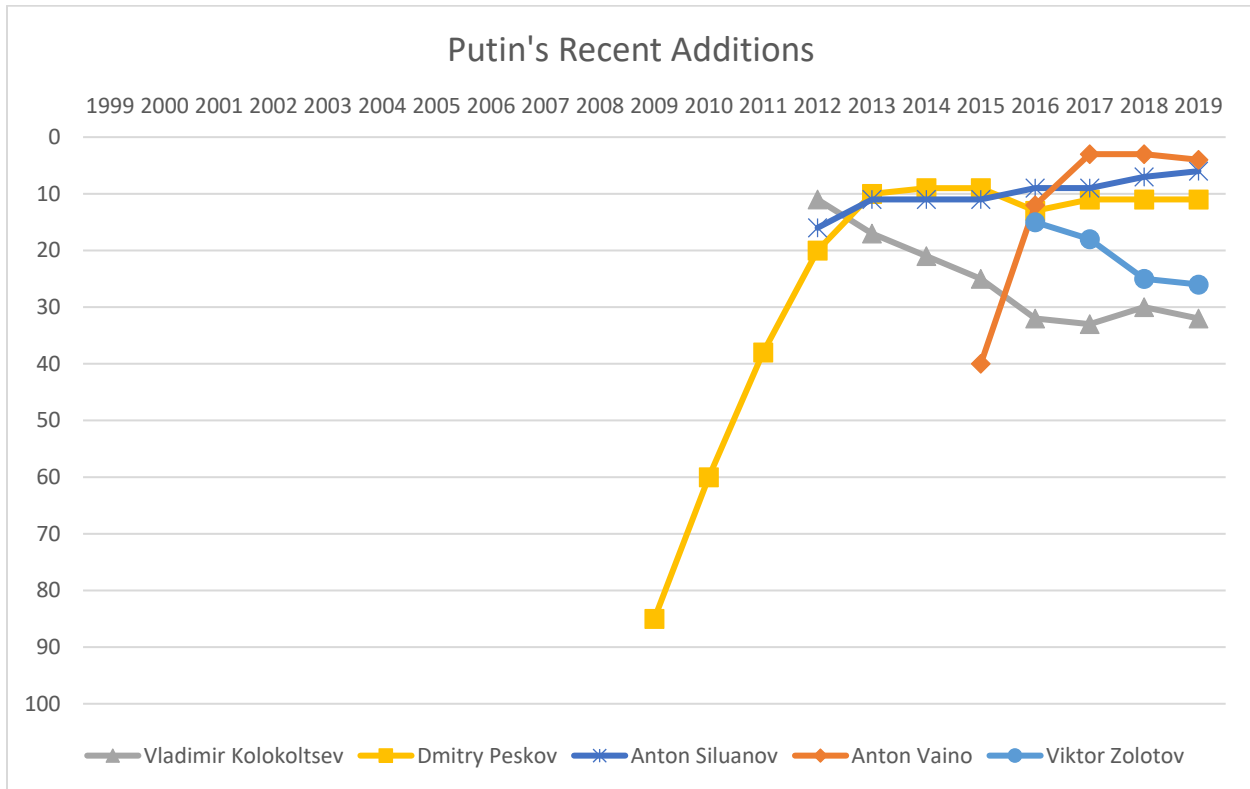
Viacheslav Volodin won his first election even earlier, serving on the Saratov city council beginning in 1990. He represented Saratov in the State Duma beginning in 1999, serving as the Duma's deputy speaker. He succeeded Sobianin as head of the government executive office in 2010 and has remained on the top twenty list since then, serving as deputy head of the presidential administration and, since 2016, as chair of the State Duma.

Finally, Anatoly Serdiukov is unique among this group in that he achieved his influence by virtue of his ties to someone in the top elite other than Putin. He appears on the list in 2007, when he moved from his previous position as head of the Federal Tax Service to Defense Minister. He dropped off the list in 2012, when he was dismissed from that position. His appointment was linked to his connection to Viktor Zubkov, as he was married to Zubkov's daughter. Despite constant criticism from members of the military, he remained in the position until his wife filed for divorce in 2012, at which point he was quickly accused of corruption and removed from his position.

### *People Who Became Influential in the Last 12 Years*

Although much has been written about efforts by Russia's senior leadership to renew Russia's political elite, very few people have joined the ranks of the most influential Russians since 2008. In fact, only one person who joined the list while Dmitry Medvedev was president has become highly influential, while another four rose to top positions between Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 and the end of 2019. As we saw in the previous section, a few others appeared on the list earlier, but only became highly influential after 2012. The five people in this group come from a variety of backgrounds, though most share the characteristic of rising to positions of influence through the ranks of the organizations they now lead, rather than achieving that position through personal connections to Putin or members of Putin's inner circle. Dmitry Peskov rose through the diplomatic service and then through the presidential press office before becoming Putin's press secretary in 2008. Anton Siluanov rose through the finance ministry, replacing the previous minister in late 2011. Anton Vaino rose through the presidential administration and has headed it since 2016. Vladimir Kolokoltsev served in various positions in the interior ministry, followed by a term as the Moscow police commissioner, before being appointed to head the interior ministry in 2012. Viktor Zolotov is the one exception in this group because he has been personally close to Putin since serving as a bodyguard to St. Petersburg mayor Anatolii Sobchak in the 1990s. Although he only appeared on the list of influential Russians in 2016, he headed the presidential security service from the start of Putin's tenure in

2000 until his appointment as head of the newly established National Guard in 2016. He thus serves as a good example of the type of individual who was missed by expert rankings because of his tendency to keep out of the limelight.



### *Inflection Points*

Although Russia’s political elite has experienced relatively little change over the last twenty years, there have been a few key moments of substantial renewal, most immediately before or after presidential elections. After the initial introduction of Putin’s team in 2000–2001, an initial shift took place in 2003–2004. This was a period of consolidation, during which holdovers from the Yeltsin administration such as Kasyanov and Voloshin left their positions and the influence of independent businessmen was largely eliminated after the arrest of Khodorkovsky. These figures’ residual influence meant that they remained on the list, though in relatively low positions, for some time thereafter. However, starting at this point, all senior officials were either members of Putin’s circle or technocrats.

A much bigger elite transition took place in 2007, with the departure of Veshniakov, Fradkov, and Zurabov and the decline in influence of Chubais, Gref, Zhukov, and Viktor Ivanov. At the same time, a large number of new people appeared on the list, including Chemezov, Bortnikov, Bastrykin, Kovalchuk, Golikova, Nabiullina, Dvorkovich, and Serdiukov. In addition, Naryshkin, Zubkov, Iakunin, and Shuvalov, who had all been on the list previously, first attained high levels of influence in 2007 or 2008. These changes occurred as part of the transition to what became known as the “tandemocracy,” a period during which Medvedev served as president while Putin was prime minister.

There was a second major transition around the 2012 presidential election, with the departures of Zubkov, Gryzlov, Khristenko, Nurgaliev, and Serdiukov and the decline of Kudrin and Surkov. At the same time, Shoigu, Bastrykin, Volodin, and Peskov became highly influential for the first time while Siluanov, Rogozin, and Kolokoltsev either first appeared on the list or returned after a lengthy absence. This date marked the consolidation of the conservative turn in Russian politics, with security officials in the ascendance and economic modernizers relegated to secondary roles.

Putin's third term was characterized largely by stability, with only a few significant shifts in influence. There were early signs of a generational shift, although few younger officials had yet reached positions of highest influence by the end of 2019, as highlighted by the dearth of people in the final group discussed above. Although a big government shakeup took place in January 2020, initial monthly polling suggests that this will result primarily in a reshuffling, with potentially limited impact on the composition of the top elite beyond the addition of the new prime minister. The shift to a new generation is coming, but the highest level still consists primarily of the people who have been with Putin since the early days of his rule. This will likely remain the case at least until the next presidential election in 2024.

### *Conclusion*

The small number of people represented in the elite suggests a high level of elite continuity, which has allowed the regime to remain remarkably stable over a twenty-year period. Regime stability can be fleeting and authoritarian regimes, in particular, can shift from the appearance of eternal stability to collapse in a brief period. Nevertheless, the level of elite continuity in Putin's Russia has allowed for a relatively high level of policy consistency. While Putin's team certainly has its share of tensions, everyone in his inner circle understands how the others operate.

The expert survey data clearly show that Russia's Putin-era political elite includes two types of officials. Members of the first group have influence because of their roles or positions in government, while members of the second group have influence independently of their positions because of their ties to Vladimir Putin. Those in the second group tend to remain influential even when they are no longer in positions of power, while those in the first group drop out of the rankings as soon as they step down from their official role. This finding suggests that the number of people with real power may be even smaller than the sixty people represented in the data set, as only the second group has lasting influence at the highest levels. It also suggests that the members of the elite who were displaced in the government turnover of January 2020 will have different fates. People who have close ties to Putin, such as Dmitry Medvedev, will remain influential, while those who have had power because of their roles in government, such as Surkov, are likely to disappear.

### *About the Author*

**Dr. Dmitry Gorenburg** is a Senior Research Scientist at CNA, where he writes on security issues in the former Soviet Union, Russian military reform, Russian foreign policy, and ethnic politics and identity. His recent research topics include decision-making processes in the senior Russian leadership, Russian naval strategy in the Pacific and the Black Sea, and Russian maritime defense doctrine. In addition to his role at CNA, he currently serves as editor of *Problems of Post-Communism* and is an Associate of the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University.

***Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI):*** *This program of research, led by the GCMC and funded by RSI (U.S. Department of Defense effort to enhance understanding of the Russian way of war in order to inform strategy and planning), employs in-depth case studies to better understand Russian strategic behavior in order to mitigate miscalculation in relations.*

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