

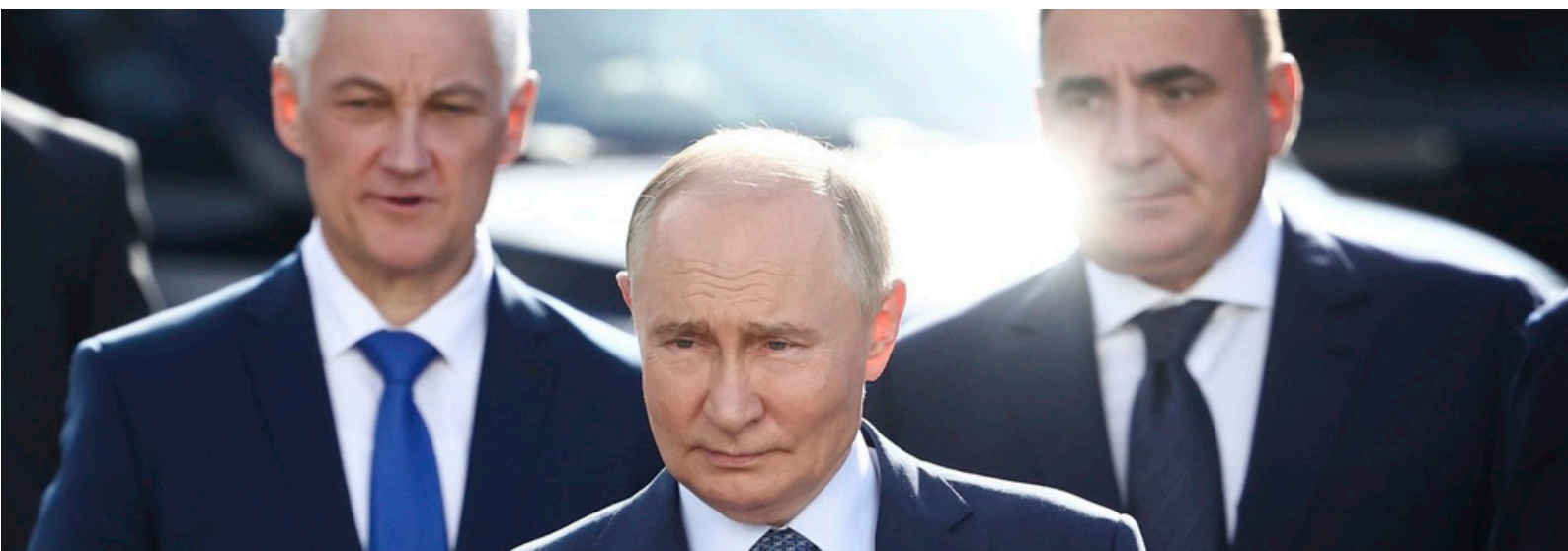
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Transition without a successor: The transformation of Putin's regime

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Executive summary

- Personnel moves in Russia in 2024–2025 mark the start of a regime transition in which authority remains concentrated in Putin's hands while routine management is delegated.
- The Kremlin is building overlapping checks and balances that reduce the prime minister's autonomy, multiply the number of decision-makers, and route major programmes through the State Council.
- Promotions favour younger officials from Putin's inner circle. Adjutants are moving into federal command roles; a second generation of the elite is consolidating positions across state and business.
- Putin may step back from micromanagement while retaining strategic command, with Alexei Dyumin functioning as a *de facto* vice-president via the State Council.
- 2024 and 2025 have seen a sharp uptick in prosecutions and property seizures that have led to the redistribution of assets to a 'second tier' of the elite whose fortunes and loyalty are personally tied to Putin.
- The war in Ukraine creates both opportunities and risks for political transition: on the one hand, the state of war enables freedom of manoeuvre without procedural constraints; on the other, it introduces vulnerabilities.
- If Putin succeeds in rejuvenating the elite, the system may gain a second wind; if not, outcomes range from gradual regime collapse (with Putin outliving it) to preservation of the regime after Putin's departure.



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Based in London and Washington, D.C., NEST Centre brings together the best expertise on Russia and the surrounding region. Its mission is to identify the forces shaping Russia's long-term future, analyse their impact and develop strategies to bring about peaceful and positive development of the country.

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Cover image: Russian President Vladimir Putin (centre), accompanied by Russian Defence Minister Andrei Belousov (left) and Russian Presidential Aide Alexei Dyumin (right), visits the Special Technology Centre in St Petersburg, Russia, 19 September 2024. (Valery Sharifulin, Sputnik, Kremlin Pool Photo via Associated Press)

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Annotation

Two central questions are shaping the trajectory of Russia's political development today: who will replace the president? And what are the prospects for the post-Putin regime? This report reconstructs the logic behind the development of the Putin system over the course of 2024–2025 and offers answers to these questions. At the same time, this study does not claim to provide definitive conclusions.

The report provides a broad account of the ruling elite, highlighting its radical transformation. It seeks to formulate a scenario rather than to predict the final outcome of the power transition. It explains the specific features of how the Russian political system is organised and how it functions – an understanding that is essential for Western policymakers and analysts who are responsible for anticipating Moscow's behaviour and calibrating responses to its policies at home and abroad.

Has the transition begun?

The personnel changes which were carried out in 2024–2025 at the start of Vladimir Putin's fifth presidential term, and the reorganisation which accompanied them, indicate with a high degree of certainty that the process of altering the system of power has begun. Taking all factors into account, the intent appears to be to complete the process in a relatively short period; that is, by the time of the 2030 presidential election.

The accompanying factors that point to an ongoing redistribution of power include:

1. The Kremlin has weakened the institutions and clans by:
 - a. radically changing their leadership and replacing them with outsiders from other 'guilds', or without direct affiliation;
 - b. keeping in place leaders who for reasons of age or health have become less capable.¹
2. Putin's adjutants² have been brought into the federal power structures, and placed in important positions in the presidential administration or in the power ministries or organisations close to them.
3. Priority has been given to bureaucrats from the younger generation who have demonstrated loyalty, managerial skills and organisational ability during the war. Among these are Artem Zhoga, the presidential representative in the Urals Federal District, Yevgeny Pervyshov, the governor of Tambov Region, and also five regional heads who previously held positions in the occupied territories.
4. Substantive administrative functions are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the president and his immediate circle, including through new sectoral departments within the presidential administration, the State Council, and the Maritime Board.
5. The government has been placed under a system of checks and balances that restricts Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and his team from making independent decisions. Among the 'restraining' figures who have been appointed to significant positions are First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, Presidential Aide on the Military-Industrial Complex Alexei Dyumin, and the Chairman of the State Development Corporation VEB.RU, Igor Shuvalov. The State Council has been granted certain powers related to the preparation and implementation of national projects.³
6. Putin has sharply increased his personal control over key agencies, at the expense of administrative efficiency. This is reflected in the appointment of 'overseers'⁴ to head the largest institutions: the Ministry of Defence, the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and the Federal Customs Service.
7. Political attacks have taken place on the upper layer of the administrative bureaucracy, in order to increase loyalty and confirm the obedience of officials and businesses during the transition period.

8. The out-of-favour Sergei Shoigu was appointed Secretary of the Security Council in place of Nikolai Patrushev, and the Security Council itself has been weakened as a centre for coordinating the power structures and determining strategy. A similar move took place in 2007, just before the power structure was reorganised to create the tandem of Putin as prime minister and Dmitry Medvedev as president. On that occasion, a new defence minister was appointed and personnel changes were made in the Interior Ministry and the FSB, which weakened the political position of the security services.

This process of transferring power is not a handover from Putin to another strong player, nor from one team to another. Rather, it is the retention of power in Putin's hands while altering the configuration of the political system: he sheds the burden of day-to-day governance but preserves full control.

This is a special type of transition, comparable to practices of the late Stalinist period: elite clans are removed from the levers of power, and their place is taken not so much by individual figures as by groups of trusted representatives drawn from the generations of 'children' and 'grandchildren'. At the same time, the power of long-standing loyal associates is weakening – in part for objective reasons linked to age – while the influence of the most loyal cohorts, namely younger bureaucrats, 'children', and adjutants, is steadily growing.

This model of transition does not provide for a genuine successor. Instead, it cultivates a circle of candidates who create the political backdrop around Putin as he withdraws from operational management. In this context, adjutants and 'children' hold value for Putin precisely because they do not belong to any established institution of power and are loyal to him alone.

The model for the power transition

Fig. 1 illustrates this model for the transition of power showing the key forces, both institutional and personal, and also the fundamental processes and risks involved. This framework reflects the situation that had taken shape a year after the beginning of Putin's current presidential term and five years before its conclusion.

The diagram illustrates the basic role assigned to dozens of new figures from Putin's close circle, all under his direct control, and to the institutions through which they will operate in the transition. Most of these individuals come from the generation of 'children' and are viewed less as partners – even junior ones – than as 'servants'.

The eleven leading figures shown below, each playing a different role in the transition, do not constitute an exhaustive list of those involved. Rather, they serve as figureheads, symbolising the various facets and directions of the transition.

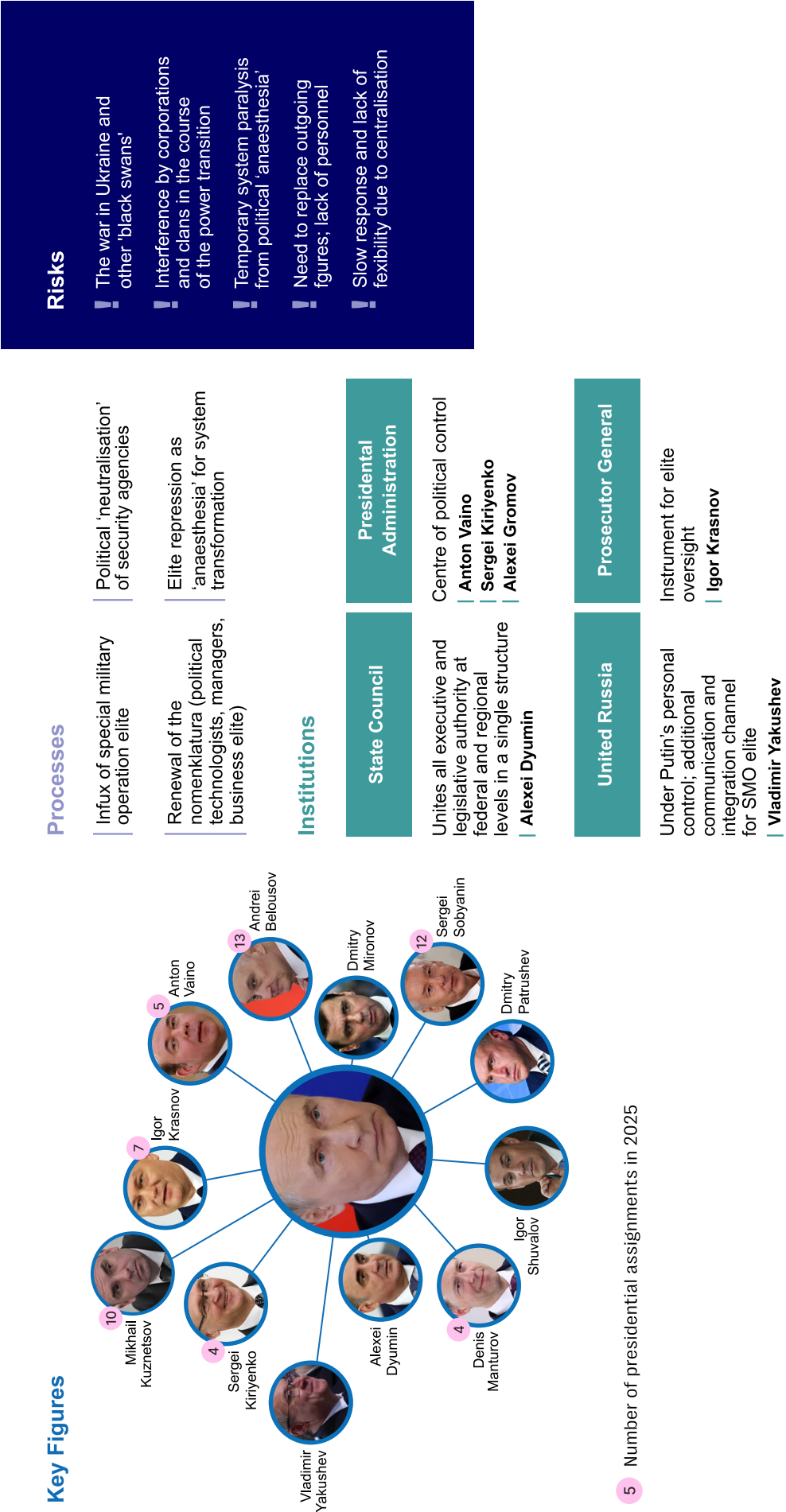
Four of them are linked to the presidential administration. They are the leader of the administration, Anton Vaino, and his first deputy, Sergei Kiriyenko; the chief personnel officer for the law enforcement agencies, Dmitry Mironov; and Alexei Dyumin – a key figure in the transition scenario under consideration in this analysis.

Three members of this group are in the government: Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Patrushev, son of Nikolai Patrushev, the long-time secretary of the Security Council; Denis Manturov; and Minister of Defence Andrei Belousov.

The quasi-party structures, which act as channels for political mobilisation between the Kremlin and society (skipping the extra layer of the senior bureaucracy), are represented by the Secretary of the United Russia Party's General Council, Vladimir Yakushev, and the Head of the Executive Committee of the All-Russia People's Front, Mikhail Kuznetsov.

The mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyannin, is one of senior leaders of the State Council, and is in charge of regional policy. Alongside him are Dyumin, Vaino and Kiriyenko. The Prosecutor General, Igor Krasnov, is seen as a punitive instrument for enforcing personnel restructuring, linking the FSB and the Investigative Committee of Russia on the one hand, and the legal system on the other.

FIG.1. POWER TRANSITION 2024–2030



The path of the transition

The transition model described here sets out how power within the regime may be redistributed by 2030:

1. Alexei Dyumin, who does not have any personal independence, an institutional affiliation or his own team, is *de facto* the vice-president. He is responsible for day-to-day management through the State Council;
2. Vladimir Putin retains the role of arbiter and strategist, including as chairman of the State Council, and its Presidium. The latter is a body with real decision-making power. The presidential administration receives new personnel, but retains its structure. Putin creates a body of deputy heads responsible for different areas within the presidential administration, and Dyumin, the senior deputy head, assumes the role of 'vice-president'.

As a result of the transition, the system switches to 'autopilot' mode:

- The number of presidential visits is reduced, especially those of minor importance. Visits continue to significant military or technical events, such as launching a nuclear warship, but local events like opening a poultry farm do not.
- The president still meets with high-ranking officials, but not junior officials.
- The president pays less attention to day-to-day details of management.
- Public speeches are expected to match the stature of the head of state: if not devoted to questions of linguistics, as some of Stalin's speeches were, then at least to the country's destiny from a historical perspective.
- The president shows 'patriarchal' concern about population growth, the upbringing of the next generation, and educational programmes and textbooks.
- The president continues to address the West with moralising statements and lectures.
- As the patriarchal leader of the country, Putin proactively makes long-term decisions about matters such as the development of the Russian Navy up to 2050, ambitious space projects, and grandiose infrastructure schemes, e.g., the construction of ports in the Arctic.

Elite renewal and the 2026 Duma elections

The 2026 State Duma elections will be an important stage in the transition process. These elections will renew the composition of the State Duma, in particular by including veterans of the war with Ukraine. The elections will be organised with the involvement of young bureaucrats and new Putin appointees – Alexei Dyumin, Igor Babushkin, and Vladimir Yakushev. The former leadership of United Russia (Andrei Turchak and his close associates) and the Kremlin's 'domestic policy bloc' – the team led by Sergei Kiriyenko – have been sidelined from the implementation of this project.

The model for the power transition

These changes can be seen as part of a broader effort to recruit a new elite ahead of the elections. Central to this process is the emerging institutional infrastructure. In April 2023, Putin created the state fund ‘Defenders of the Fatherland’, headed by his niece Anna Tsivileva, to provide targeted assistance to veterans of the invasion of Ukraine. Two years later, in March 2025, he expanded the initiative by establishing within the State Council a new Commission on Veterans of Combat Operations.⁵

The Commission included 15 governors, nine deputy ministers, representatives of presidential envoys, the Civic Chamber, the All-Russia People’s Front, and the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, as well as future bureaucrats who participate in the presidential programme ‘Time of Heroes’. The chairmanship went to Astrakhan governor Igor Babushkin, one of Putin’s trusted appointees who has an FSB background.

These steps can be seen as the beginning of the recruitment of a new elite, into which young technocrats will be integrated alongside participants in the war in Ukraine and their families.

Changes in the political system: fragmentation and counterweights

Within Putin's system of governance, authority is being fragmented and additional mechanisms of checks and balances are being constructed, both for current use and with a view to the future.

In the executive branch, this is reflected in the weakening of Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's position through the promotion of Denis Manturov to the post of First Deputy Prime Minister, and Igor Shuvalov to the chairmanship of a special working group for coordinating development institutions within the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects.⁶

Shuvalov's working group on development is responsible for 'federal projects for the achievement of national development goals', which costs up to 30 trillion roubles (\$373.5 billion as of August 2025).⁷ This is more than half of all the funds being spent on national projects, and roughly three quarters of all state expenditure.⁸ In other words, the state corporation VEB.RF, headed by Shuvalov, has *de facto* control over financing in key areas of national development. This move not only dilutes Mishustin's authority but also creates overlapping zones of responsibility between the prime minister and Shuvalov, institutionalising a fragmented structure of executive power.

In the military-industrial complex, three coordinators were appointed: the Deputy Chairman of the Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, the Secretary of the State Council, Alexei Dyumin, and the Secretary of the Security Council, Sergei Shoigu. This system complements the Military-Industrial Commission,⁹ where Denis Manturov (one of Putin's trusted associates) is the deputy chairman and runs the commission's collegium. None of these four coordinators could be considered as an independent political figure; they are all under Putin's direct control.

This fragmentation of the centres of power and the decision-making process shifts the political system's centre of gravity upwards and strengthens Putin's personal role. Such a structure reduces adaptability and heightens institutional risks: managerial flexibility is constrained, and responses to crisis situations are slowed.

The Security Council and the State Council

After the reshuffle of May 2024, which initiated the transition, the Security Council and the State Council effectively switched roles. Once Nikolai Patrushev left the Security Council it was in the public eye much less than it had been.

The State Council, on the other hand, was given a boost: if previously it had been a subsidiary body, with its status defined by the constitutional reform of 2020 and the subsequent law ‘On the State Council’,¹⁰ under the leadership of Alexei Dyumin it became a centre for political coordination with expanded functions and greater publicity.

In July 2024, Putin signed presidential decree No. 613, which replaced the previous 18 commissions of the State Council with 21 commissions on socio-economic development. These commissions were headed by regional governors. Some of the old commissions were divided, and a new one was established, on ‘The Northern Sea Passage and the Arctic’.¹¹

The Security Council

The Security Council of Russia has traditionally served as one of the key centres of strategic coordination in the Putin system. Until 2024 it functioned as an important venue for agenda-setting in the security and foreign-policy spheres. Since mid-2024, however, its influence has steadily declined, due to several factors.

First, the appointment of Sergei Shoigu as secretary of the Security Council led to a clear weakening of its apparatus. Unlike his predecessor, Nikolai Patrushev, Shoigu was unable to embed his own team: only a handful of aides moved with him, while key positions – including that of the first deputy secretary – remained in the hands of the entrenched ‘Patrushev group’. His position is further complicated by the loss of the president’s personal trust and by his lack of proximity to Putin, a resource Patrushev had long enjoyed.

Second, the Security Council has become increasingly gerontocratic. It functions as a platform for senior figures from the political, security and foreign-policy establishment. The average age of permanent members, who meet weekly is 67. At the same time, its composition has expanded to include a growing number of individuals who have formally left office but retained their permanent-member status by presidential decree. Among them are former defence minister and head of the presidential administration Sergei Ivanov, former secretary of the Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, and former president and prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, who was given the specially created post of deputy chairman.

Third, the Council’s strategic role has diminished. Whereas Patrushev could act as an ideologist and long-term strategist, Shoigu’s functions are largely representative: he has become Putin’s envoy to ‘friendly’ leaders abroad. Since taking office, Shoigu has made three visits to North Korea, two to China, and one to Iran.

The State Council

The State Council is a constitutional body designed as a coordination platform linking federal authorities and the regions, but under Alexei Dyumin’s stewardship it has evolved into a central node of political management.

The State Council consists of 21 permanent commissions, 19 of which are devoted to key areas of socio-economic development, such as industry, transport, energy, education, healthcare, culture, and digital transformation, and are headed primarily by regional governors.

These governors, who chair the commissions, form the backbone of the State Council Presidium and act as intermediaries between the Kremlin and the regions. At least two of them are Dyumin's protégés,¹² highlighting his growing influence over the body's composition. Beyond their formal role in the Presidium, governors participate alongside senior government officials and the presidential administration in meetings of the Presidential Council for Strategic Development and National Projects, chaired by Putin. Within this framework, they sit on project committees for national projects as deputy heads and, along with government ministers, receive direct assignments from the president in their respective policy areas.

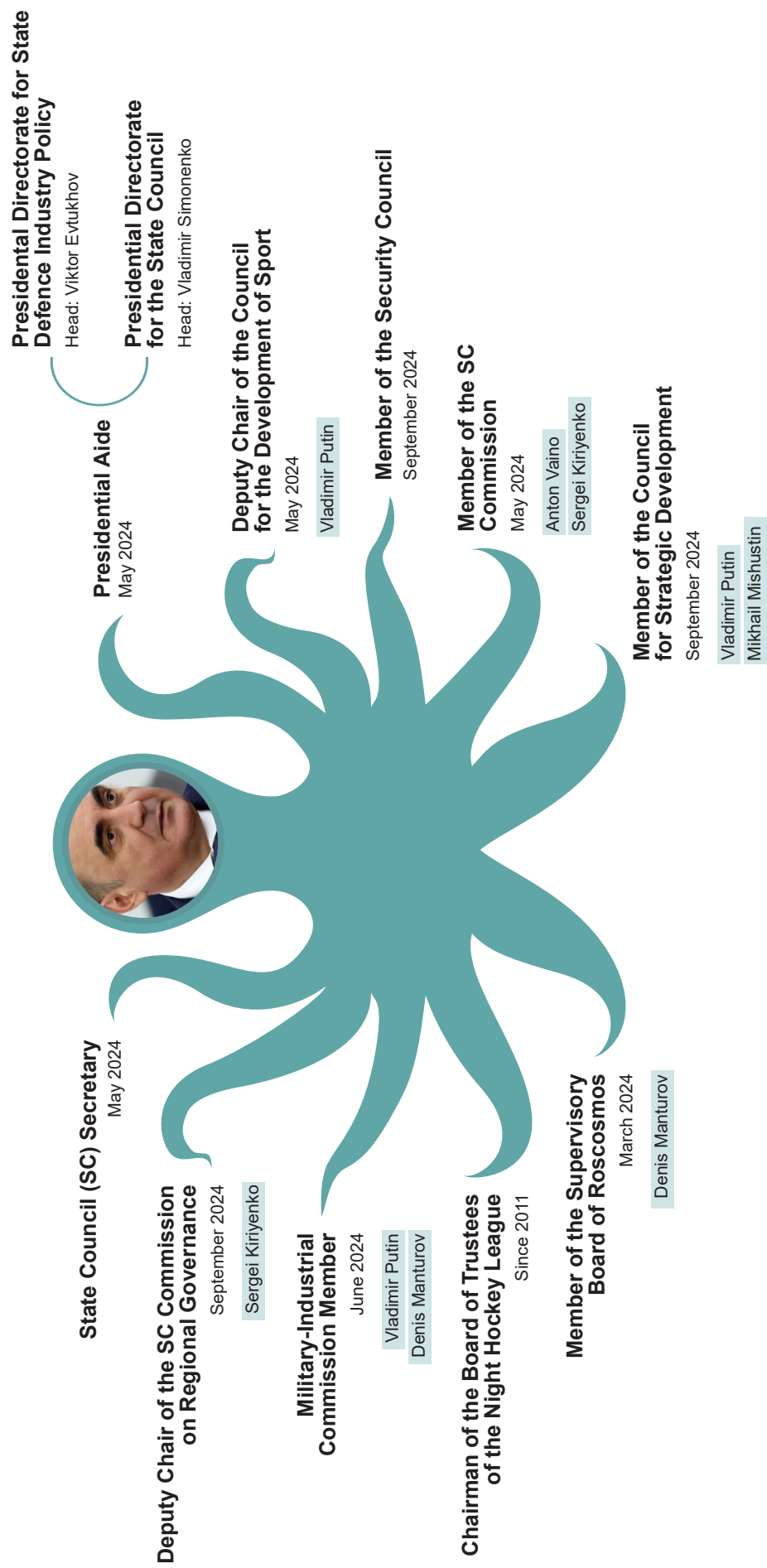
In addition to the governor-led commissions, the State Council also includes two coordination commissions. The first, on enabling interaction between bodies of public authority, is headed by presidential chief of staff Anton Vaino, with Sergei Kiriyenko as his deputy. The second, on coordinating and evaluating the effectiveness of executive bodies in Russia's regions, is chaired by Kiriyenko himself. His deputies are Alexei Dyumin, deputy head of the presidential administration Maksim Oreshkin, and Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin.

Participation in key governance institutions enabled Alexei Dyumin, the former presidential security officer and governor of Tula Region in the 2010s, to secure a stable position in the upper echelons of power within a short period of time, turning him into a notable political actor and a possible candidate to succeed Putin.

Dyumin's position within Russia's institutional architecture (see Fig. 2) allows him to establish both formal and informal connections with actors at the federal and regional levels. He combines gubernatorial experience, proximity to the president, and growing influence in the State Council with access to decision-makers across different tiers of authority. However, while broad in scope, these connections are relatively recent and remain shallow.

Since early 2025, as secretary of the State Council, he has been holding regular meetings with its commissions, building ties with governors and cabinet members.¹³ In his parallel role as a presidential aide, Dyumin oversees two newly created directorates within the presidential administration: one supporting the work of the State Council, the other supervising the defence-industrial complex. He also sits on the 'expanded' Security Council and participates in several presidential councils and commissions, including the Military-Industrial Commission and the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects.

FIG. 2. ALEXEI DYUMIN IN THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT BODIES



Sergey Kiriyenko The highlighted figures are officials and actors with whom Alexei Dyumin interacts in the course of his official duties

Informal networking is facilitated by Dyumin's chairmanship of the board of trustees of the Night Hockey League, where, alongside Vladimir Putin, he has at different times played with Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, Security Council secretary Sergei Shoigu, Moscow Region governor Andrei Vorobyov, businessman Gennady Timchenko, oligarch brothers Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, Interros president Vladimir Potanin, and other representatives of the political and business elite.

Alexei Dyumin also shares a background in the presidential security services with other former adjutants and with Putin's former bodyguard Viktor Zolotov, who now heads the National Guard [Rosgvardiya].

Taken together, Dyumin's role positions him as one of the regime's key integrators across institutional and informal arenas. Nevertheless, the most plausible scenario is not that of a designated successor but rather of Dyumin evolving into a *de facto* vice-president – an operational deputy acting under Putin's direct oversight. It remains premature to regard him as a genuine heir: Putin shows no intention of leaving the stage, and Dyumin at this point functions less as an autonomous actor than as a carefully managed proxy within a highly personalised system of rule.

The Defence Ministry post-Shoigu

Andrei Belousov, who replaced Shoigu as defence minister, remains an isolated figure. His team of deputies was formed without his input. The only exception is Oleg Savelyev, who worked under Belousov in the Ministry for Economic Development in 2012–2013. Belousov has also crossed paths with the First Deputy Defence Minister, Leonid Gornin, who previously was deputy and then first deputy finance minister. Two other deputies to Belousov, Secretary of State Anna Tsivileva and Pavel Fradkov, were personally chosen by Putin from among the 'children' of the elite.

Belousov combines the role of an ideologue of the system responsible for strengthening state governance, with that of a crisis manager, capable of making tough decisions and ensuring that objectives are met. In 2011, at his initiative, the Agency for Strategic Initiatives (ASI) was established, and until 2017 it was headed by his protégé, Andrei Nikitin.¹⁴

One of the first moves made by Belousov as defence minister in June 2024 was to create the Technical Council of the People's Military-Industrial Complex (MIC). This body was conceived as a platform for interaction between the armed forces, the MIC and the scientific community, with the aim of accelerating the introduction of new military technologies.

Belousov employed volunteers, philanthropists, the People's MIC (small and medium-sized businesses and freelancers in the defence sector) and the Defence Ministry to bypass the strictly regimented and lengthy process of development, trial, experimental and serial production, and hasten the production of drones. Through the Technical Council of the People's MIC, 30 advanced technical teams were created which were able to begin serial production.

Changes in the political system: fragmentation and counterweights

The output by civilian manufacturers of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and first-person view (FPV) drones was increased by the end of 2024,¹⁵ and the Russian Armed Forces plan to establish a separate branch dedicated to unmanned systems.

On 16 December 2024, Belousov's priorities became clearer when he delivered a speech to the collegium of the Defence Ministry, setting out ten fundamental directives¹⁶ for the armed forces in 2025 and the mid-term future:

1. Victory in the special military operation (SMO);
2. Modernising the armed forces to match the military capabilities of the USA;
3. Modernising military education by creating a system of continuous professional education for military personnel;
4. Improving medical provision for military personnel and their families;
5. Improving social provision for military personnel and their families;
6. Creating a system for feedback;
7. Developing military-technical cooperation with 'friendly' countries;
8. Increasing the efficiency of construction and the use of property;
9. Optimising the ministry's internal processes;
10. Creating a unified digital environment in the Defence Ministry.

As defence minister, Andrei Belousov is a permanent member of the Security Council. By August 2025 Belousov had taken part in 38 meetings of the Council, delivering reports at three of them:

- **On 28 June 2024**, he spoke together with the Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, about the moratorium on medium- and short-range missiles;
- **On 16 August 2024**, he talked about new technical decisions being taken in the special military operation;
- **On 1 April 2025**, he delivered a report on countering the terrorist threat and on responses to Ukrainian strikes against Russia's energy infrastructure, together with FSB director Alexander Bortnikov, who co-reported on behalf of the security services – a format that underscored the alignment of military and intelligence priorities.

A purge of the higher military leadership has continued since Belousov was appointed defence minister. Dozens of senior officers have been arrested on charges of corruption. Belousov himself has been nicknamed 'the iron people's commissar', due to his demanding nature and his asceticism.¹⁷ But he seems to merely demonstrate an intention to restore order in the military, rather than implementing it in practice. His deputies, Fradkov and Tsivileva, are responsible for key areas – property and social protection for military personnel – and this immediately strengthens the Kremlin's control over spending, as well as over the whole functioning of the defence sector.

Belousov is religious and a member of the Diveyevo Brotherhood, along with Mishustin, Kiriyenko and other high-ranking officials.¹⁸ Until 2006, he worked in analytical centres, and he has maintained wide connections with his economist colleagues. He founded the Centre for Macro-Analysis and Short-Term Forecasting, where his brother, Dmitry, continues to work. As an assistant to the president from 2013–2020, Belousov supervised the Expert Directorate, led by Vladimir Simonenko. Simonenko is now head of the Directorate for the Formation and Activities of the State Council, cooperating with Alexei Dyumin (see Fig. 2).

Reformatting United Russia

The 2026 State Duma elections are presented as a crucial stage in the transition, with the Kremlin pursuing two key objectives: renewing the membership of the State Duma through an influx of new figures, and institutionalising the presence of veterans of the special military operation within the political system. Nearly three-quarters of mandates are expected to be filled by newcomers, a significant share of them intended to be veterans of the war in Ukraine.

To achieve this, three measures are being implemented: the large-scale inclusion of veterans in primaries and party lists; the development of a reserve of young bureaucrats and political technologists; and the structural renewal of United Russia's organisational apparatus.

Responsibility for carrying out this project rests with United Russia, while the Kremlin's domestic policy bloc under Sergei Kiriyenko has been sidelined from direct involvement.

In recent party developments, Andrei Turchak, who had been appointed as head of United Russia's general council in 2017, was unexpectedly moved to be head of the Altai Republic in June 2024. His position in the party was taken by Vladimir Yakushev, a member of Sergei Sobyenin's team from Tyumen, and his successor as Tyumen Region governor from 2005–2018. Yakushev also took over Turchak's position as first deputy chairman of the Federation Council.

Yakushev radically reformed the management of United Russia, reducing the presidium of the general council from 35 people to 14. He retained only one deputy instead of the previous six: the head of the United Russia faction in the State Duma, Vladimir Vasilyev.

Eight 'Heroes of Russia' – participants in the special military operation – have joined the party's higher council, including the leader of the 'Movement of the First',¹⁹ Artur Orlov. Around 20 participants have become members of United Russia's general council.

In the 2025 primaries, 827 veterans of the special military operation took part out of 1,116 who applied – nearly twice as many as the year before. Most have proven successful: in the previous elections, around 80 per cent of veteran participants secured deputy mandates, predominantly at the municipal level.

Their activity remains high this year: according to *Kommersant*, 33 veterans will run on United Russia's ticket in legislative assembly elections across ten regions, signalling a consolidation of their presence not only at the grassroots but also at the regional level.²⁰ The inclusion of veterans in councils and party lists bolsters United Russia's legitimacy and strengthens its positioning as a party of front-line soldiers.

There were no significant personnel changes in the regional sections of United Russia over the past year. Alterations in the system of management were focused mainly on educational programmes and measures to raise the motivation of the regional party activists.

There are currently more than 2.6 million party members, which represents an increase of 50,000 over the past year. The number of supporters has reached 899,000, which is up by 60,000.

It is too early to make a comprehensive assessment of Yakushev's performance as the *de facto* head of the 'party of power'.²¹ Putin has effectively handed over control of United Russia to a group connected to Sobyenin. This group is marked out by its administrative capabilities rather than its political orientation, and it concentrates on regional management. It is clear that Yakushev was given the green light to carry out a swift and radical shake-up of the party leadership, and to create an effective party machine.

In the run-up to the 2026 State Duma elections, it is this party machine, rather than the Kremlin's domestic policy bloc, that is taking on the task of bringing new people in to the system of power, including veterans of the war in Ukraine.

The pulse of the system

The ongoing transition is evident not only in changes to the design of the system but also in its functioning and outcomes. The first indications can be observed in three areas:

- A lengthening of planning horizons and an increased emphasis on long-term investment;
- A shift in problem-solving practices, with Putin delegating minor routine matters in order to focus on major issues;
- An attempt to set the system on 'autopilot', with the expectation that it will subsequently operate in a semi-automatic mode.

Extended planning periods

The usual planning period in Russia for strategic documents is six years; that is, up to the next presidential elections, and anticipating the next presidential cycle. However, new plans are being made which go far beyond this. For example, in 2019 the government approved the Strategy for Development of the Shipbuilding Industry up to the year 2035, and this has now been modified to 2036, with the long-term perspective extending to 2050.²²

A number of other strategic plans have been updated to cover the period up to the year 2050:

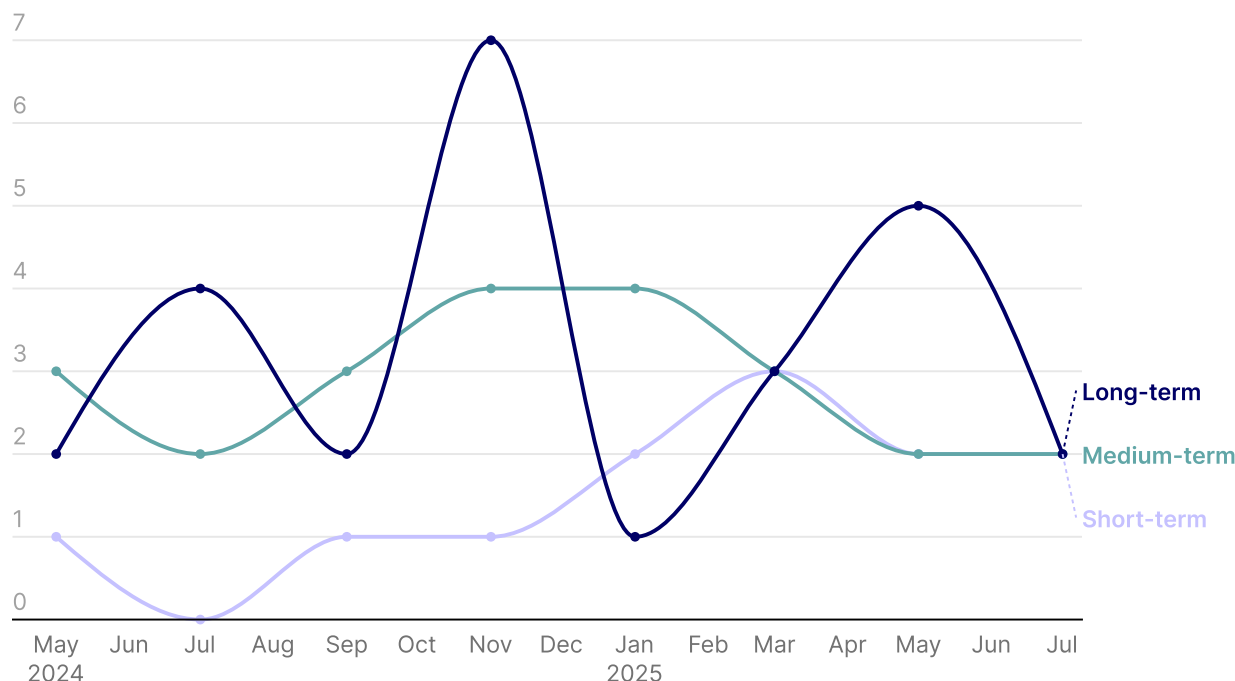
- The Strategy for the Development of the Mineral Resource Base of the Russian Federation (revised July 2024)
- The National Energy Strategy (revised April 2025)²³
- The Strategy for the Development of the Russian Navy (revised May 2025)²⁴
- The Strategy for the Development of the Russian Arctic Zone (adopted 2020, revised 2023)²⁵
- The creation of a Russian space station and ambitious plans to explore the further reaches of space; and others.

Vital long-term investment is needed in order to fulfil long-term strategic programmes aimed for ten or twenty years ahead, or even longer. Multi-billion rouble investments have been seen in plans for the development of the Arctic and the construction of a new fleet of ice-breakers with all the necessary infrastructure; in ambitious geostrategic and transport projects;²⁶ in the rapid development of industry in the Far East, including energy facilities and shipbuilding; in a network of modern university campuses; and so on.

The reconsideration of several recently adopted strategies and programmes, together with the extension of their timelines, signals that the idea of a quick war has been abandoned. Planning is instead being redirected toward a long-term confrontation with the West,

FIG. 3. PRESIDENTIAL ORDERS TO BE FULFILLED IN 2024–2025

Distribution of orders by planning horizon



Data source: Kremlin.ru | Chart: NEST Centre

The graph above (Fig. 3), which shows the distribution of Putin’s orders across short-, medium-, and long-term categories, indicates a modest but noticeable increase in long-term directives since May 2024. This rise has been uneven but discernible. The peak in autumn 2024 reflects orders to develop Sergiev Posad as a national spiritual centre, along with initiatives on sports infrastructure and export growth. The spring 2025 peak corresponds to directives on federal social projects – primarily those targeting youth – as well as investment in the regions and the strengthening of institutions.

New priorities in Putin’s activity

Several trends stand out in Putin’s circle of associates:

- A gradual shift from micro- to macro-management: problems are still discussed through visuals and in detail, but now at the highest level, involving at least deputy prime ministers and the heads of the largest corporations;
- Greater attention to the education and upbringing of the next generation of Russians;
- Discussions on Russia’s fate and its victorious history;
- The creation of a new Union of Russian Writers and concern for citizens’ morality; protecting them from the corrupting influences of the West;

The development of Sergiev Posad as the national spiritual centre²⁷ and a global tourist attraction. Putin's various meetings with young people, which have been especially frequent in 2025, go beyond solving simply practical issues such as creating the necessary image for the ageing 'father of the nation', and can be seen as yet another move away from the routine of management.

The lengthy conversation Putin held in May 2025 with participants in one of his favourite projects, the 'Sirius' educational centre in Sochi,²⁸ and members of the 'Talent and Success' foundation may also fall into this category. These projects have been developing since 2014, so they are hardly new, which makes Putin's personal involvement in them at the height of the war even more surprising.

Changes in the systems of management and control

The national projects have become the main innovation in the system of management in the civilian sector, as a way of managing and applying dual control by the president and the government. They have provided a significant boost to the system, both in its presidential and its parliamentary components.

On 7 May 2024, Putin signed the decree on national development goals up to 2030–2036. By the end of that month the government had confirmed the timetable for holding strategy sessions to prepare the new national projects.

As mentioned above, in July 2024 Putin created 21 State Council commissions for socio-economic development, headed by governors. Once this was done, he ordered the government to include the chairpersons of these commissions in the project committees for the national projects as deputy chairpersons of these committees.

Throughout the summer of 2024, the government conducted strategy sessions on each national project,²⁹ and by the end of August all 19 national projects were ready.

But then the system began to stall. Finalising the regulations for the projects – both within government and in external bodies, primarily the presidential administration and the Ministry of Finance – took as long as drafting the projects themselves. As a result, to Putin's great displeasure, the national projects appeared in their final form only in January 2025, which was exactly when they were meant to be put into operation.

The finalisation of the documentation for the national projects did not end the disputes and friction between government officials and the newcomers in the presidential administration and the State Council commissions. The commissions themselves, together with their overseers from the All-Russia People's Front and the Accounts Chamber, were tasked not only with implementing the government's announced plans but also with submitting specific initiatives and recommendations to the government.

Putin publicly reprimanded the project managers at the first meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects in June 2025, following the launch of the new national projects. His criticism focused on poor planning, delays in preparing the regulatory framework, and problems with financing.³⁰

The evidence presented here may point to a transition that is already underway. At the same time, it is true that if Putin has set himself the goal of putting the system on ‘autopilot’, he has not yet come close to achieving it, as the continuing adjustments to the system indicate.

Network analysis of the elite: with and without Putin

A network analysis³¹ carried out in 2021 of Putin's higher *nomenklatura*, based on the list of the 100 leading politicians in Russia drawn up by the newspaper 'Nezavisimaya gazeta' and the Agency for Political and Economic Communication, underscored some curious peculiarities in the organisation of the Russian elite.

As expected, President Putin occupied the centre of this structure, surpassing all other actors in the number of his connections, the degree of his proximity to them, and his role as an intermediary.

At the same time, the degree of centralisation of the network was low due to the diversity of the horizontal connections between the remaining figures. On the one hand, the network revealed the existence of various communities; on the other hand, the links *between* these communities were greater than the links *within* them.³² This informal network showed a high level of interconnection, which reduced the risk of divisions among the elite – the Achilles' heel of authoritarian regimes.

The most important characteristic of this network appeared to be the fact that the shortest route between the various players often ran through an intermediary. This position as a 'broker' between communities helped to close structural gaps and mediate between groups of players who were closely connected between themselves and had few connections with other groups. In the 2021 analysis, aside from Putin himself, those who played the central intermediary role were Anton Vaino, Alexei Kudrin, Sergei Sobyenin, and Alexei Gromov.

What is particularly interesting is the graph which appears when Putin and all of his connections are removed from the picture. In 2021, keeping all of the relevant interconnections (formal and informal) but removing Putin, Sechin was the one in the centre, and the second focal point was Medvedev. After them, the strongest positions were filled by Putin's old colleagues from the St Petersburg mayor's office.

In this scenario, the role of the *siloviki*, the leading figures in the presidential administration, and certain representatives of trusted businesses (such as the Rotenberg brothers and Gennady Timchenko) became less relevant (Yury Kovalchuk retained his important position in the network).

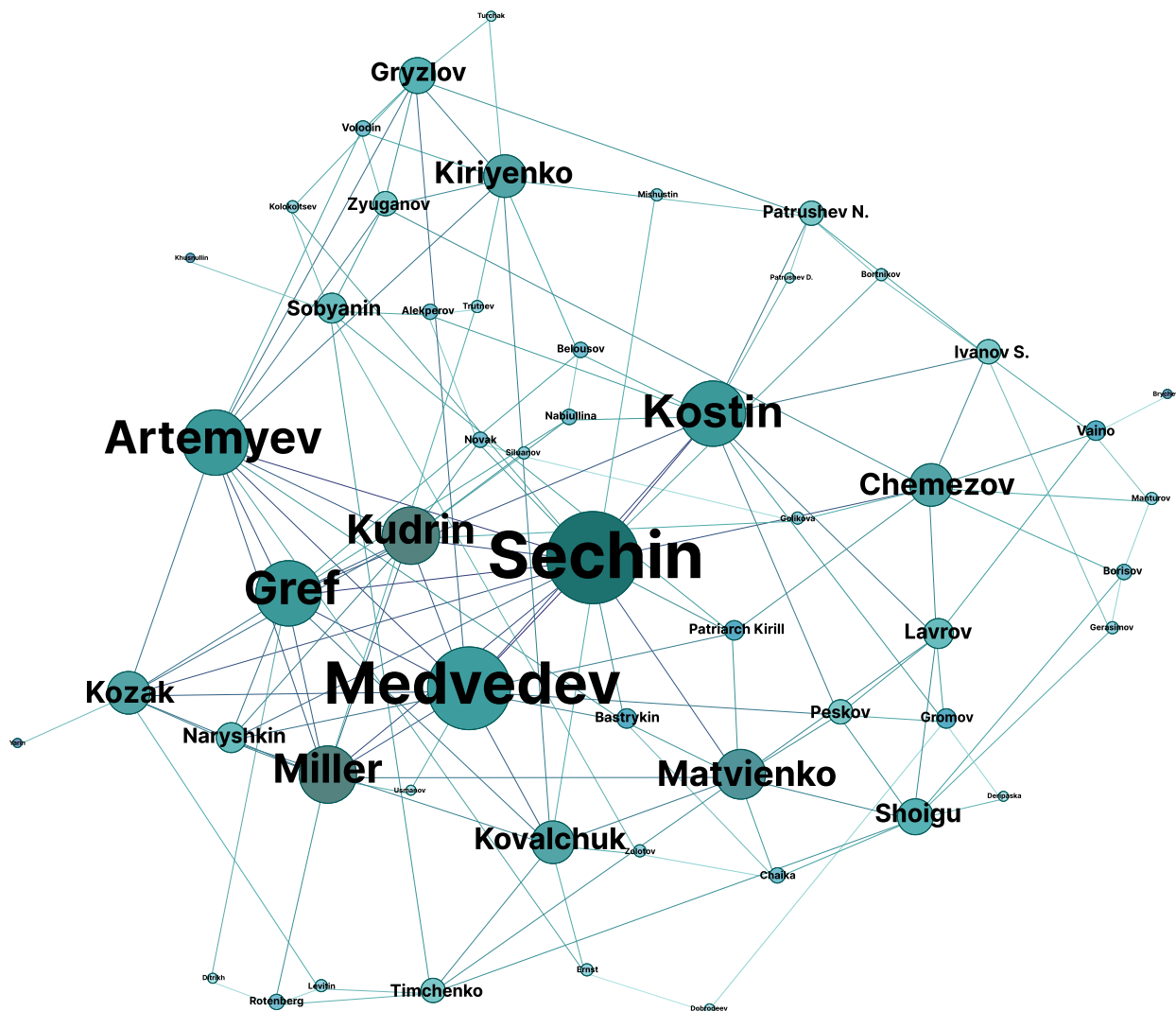
The core of the higher *nomenklatura* was formed at the start of the century, and continues to be influenced by the officials who came to power in Putin's first term. For twenty years, Putin's associates from St Petersburg have served as an indispensable cadre, who advanced within the main institutions of state power and increased their bureaucratic weight through informal ties within their own circle.

Key connections within the network shown in Fig. 4 illustrate the major changes that have occurred among the senior members of Putin's elite over the past five years. Some of the individuals who were in key positions have vanished deep into the political wilderness, while others have become completely inactive. New figures have come to the fore, including some not shown in the transition diagram (Fig. 1).

The role of clans in the structure of Putin's elite has reduced considerably as the role of the *nomenklatura* has grown. This has been the case especially since the start of the full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022. At the same time, significant personnel and generational shifts have taken place within Putin's inner circle (see the chapter 'The new cohorts: Putin's "adjutants", "children" and "youngsters"').

Unlike the 2021 network analysis, the current analysis focuses on complex, multi-level chains of connections, which are linked particularly to two central figures: Andrei Belousov (see 'The Defence Ministry post-Shoigu'), the old generation official, and Alexei Dyumin (see 'The State Council'), the new generation official.

FIG. 4. CONNECTIVITY GRAPH OF THE PUTIN ELITE IN 2021, EXCLUDING PUTIN



A comparison of 'functional' versus 'media' bureaucracy

An obstacle to making any analysis of the *nomenklatura* is the selective publicity which distorts the impression of the key figures and turns any choice by the experts into a subjective and unchanging one. The discussion tends to focus on the same figures, to whom the same assessments are habitually applied.

To establish more precisely the composition of Putin's core bureaucracy in 2024–2025, the authors of this report compiled a list of figures who met the president and were given tasks to carry out; the permanent members of the Security Council; the members of Putin's 'power cabinet'; and the leaders of his administration, the State Council presidium, the government, and the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects. If the governors who are leading the State Council commissions are included, this comes to 129 people; without these governors the total is 114. This can be called the 'functional' list.

A comparison with the alternative list 'Russia's 100 Leading Politicians' which is largely focused on the politicians' media³³ appearances revealed an overlap of around 60 per cent.

To illustrate the discrepancies between the 'functional' and 'media' lists, a comparison of Dmitry Mironov from the functional list with Sergei Mironov from the list of one hundred politicians is helpful. Dmitry, a 57-year-old assistant to the president responsible for personnel policy, head of the commission on state service, and a colonel-general of police, does not appear in the media ranking. By contrast, Sergei, a 72-year-old member of the State Duma and chairman of the party *A Just Russia – for Truth* and its small faction, features in the media list but is absent from the functional one.

In practice, Dmitry Mironov can be regarded as carrying greater weight and influence than Sergei Mironov. This points to a broader distinction: the 'functional' list highlights the role of the presidential administration, whereas the 'media' ranking places greater emphasis on the composition of the State Duma. For the purposes of analysis, the 'functional' list offers a perspective that more closely approximates the real balance of power within the *nomenklatura*.

The parameters of both lists of 'Putin's elite' are laid out in the table below. Of the five groups presented in each list, the largest is the political technologists, especially those who implement a wide spectrum of presidential powers within the 'President Writ Large' institution.³⁴ The second largest group is the managers: the 'technocrats' in Mishustin's government. The *siloviki* and the business segments of the bureaucracy are roughly the same size, making up from one seventh to one ninth of the list. The role of the regional leaders at the federal level remains limited, although it appears to be gradually increasing.

Based on the 'functional' assessment, the average age of the upper echelons of Putin's *nomenklatura* is 59, younger than Putin himself. The average time that an individual has filled a post is almost nine years, despite the active movement between positions in recent times. The *siloviki* group is the oldest, with an average age of 64. The business elite are slightly younger, averaging 62.8 years. The youngest of all are the regional politicians, at 51.3 years; the political technologists and the state managers are on average 57–58 years old. The business elite are the ones who have been working in their field for the longest (on average, 15.9 years), followed by the influential people in the regions and the political technologists (8.7 years).

Given the significant differences in the personnel of Putin's bureaucratic elite, the structural similarity of these functional and expert samples is both significant and symbolic. Despite the recent noticeable personnel changes and alterations in the roles of individuals, the internal mechanics of the system remain unchanged.

TABLE 1. AVERAGE AGE, TENURE IN OFFICE, AND EMBEDDEDNESS OF THE PUTIN ELITE BY FUNCTIONAL GROUP

List	Age	Tenure	Embeddedness	Match
Media	61.6	9.0	4.3	71.72% (71/99)
Functional	58.7	8.7	4.4	62.28% (71/114)
Siloviki	Age	Tenure	Embeddedness	
Media	64.8	8.2	4.3	100% (12/12)
Functional	64.0	7.2	4.1	85.7% (12/14)
Regional politicians	Age	Tenure	Embeddedness	
Media	59.2	11.8	5.0	66.67% (4/6)
Functional	51.3	8.7	4.9	44.44% (4/9)
Political technologists	Age	Tenure	Embeddedness	
Media	61.9	7.2	4.2	55.0% (22/40)
Functional	58.0	8.7	4.3	51.2% (22/43)
State officials	Age	Tenure	Embeddedness	
Media	57.8	4.9	3.8	88.5% (23/26)
Functional	57.4	5.2	4.4	74.2% (23/31)
Business	Age	Tenure	Embeddedness	
Media	65.7	20.6	5.0	66.7% (10/15)
Functional	62.8	15.9	4.8	62.5% (10/16)

The new cohorts: Putin's 'adjutants', 'children', and 'youngsters'

The processes of elite renewal described above in the context of the political transition are manifested most clearly in the emergence of three distinct cohorts: Putin's former adjutants, the so-called 'children' of senior figures, and a younger generation of bureaucrats. While each of these groups has gained visibility in recent years, their significance is not the same. The adjutants stand out as the most consequential: personally loyal to the president, tested in close service, and increasingly promoted to positions with real decision-making authority. By contrast, the 'children' and the younger bureaucrats largely remain within the ranks of routine administration. Their advancement reflects the ongoing reproduction of the *nomenklatura* rather than a deliberate strategy of succession.

'The adjutants'

Promoting his adjutants onto the political stage is one of Putin's long-term initiatives. He began this project in 2016, before the completion of his third term (which, at the time, was expected to be his penultimate term).

In February 2016, Alexei Dyumin was appointed governor of Tula Region. In July that year Dmitry Mironov received a similar appointment in Yaroslavl Region, and Yevgeny Zinichev in Kaliningrad Region. Two years later, in 2018, Sergei Morozov was made governor of Astrakhan Region, but was replaced less than a year later by Igor Babushkin. Babushkin was not actually an adjutant to Putin, but a bodyguard and a member of the *Spetsnaz* [special purpose forces], who had been picked out by Putin back in 1999. All of these men went through courses at the General Staff Academy, served a year or two as assistants or deputies to the leaders of federal security or law-enforcement bodies, and were given the rank of general.

Two of this group of governors-come-generals were promoted to the higher echelons of the federal authorities: Mironov and Dyumin. Mironov was appointed presidential assistant for personnel issues in October 2021, and in May 2024 Dyumin was given a similar position supervising the military-industrial complex and the State Council.

Zinichev's time as the governor of Kaliningrad Region lasted just 70 days. After this he was made deputy director of the FSB, then Minister for Emergency Situations. He died in 2021 in an accident during an exercise in the extreme north of Russia.

In September 2018, General Morozov was made acting governor of Astrakhan Region, but as early as June 2019 he retired. Babushkin, a former presidential representative and a member of the special services, was appointed in his place. He was later re-appointed and remains governor of the region.

An alternative path for former adjutants is to move immediately to leading positions in key federal structures, bypassing the stage of an 'internship' as a governor. Alexander Kurenkov was appointed Minister for Emergency Situations after a brief spell working as an assistant to the president and deputy head of the National Guard [Rosgvardiya], being formally appointed when he was already in post. In a similar way, Valery Pikalev became head of the Federal Customs Service, not through a governorship but after five years of leading the administration of the governor of St Petersburg.

The 'bypass scenario' also entails cases of removal. A telling example is that of General Roman Gavrilov, who between 2017 and 2022 served as aide to the director of Rosgvardiya and later as deputy director. Despite being seen as Viktor Zolotov's right-hand man and one of his likely successors, he was unexpectedly dismissed from his post in March 2022 and disappeared from the political scene.

Putin's adjutants, who spent years in his constant presence and proved themselves on numerous occasions, have become the natural personnel reserve for an ageing autocrat. Their promotion coincided with the start of the war but had been prepared in advance: this was not a series of ad hoc appointments, but the implementation of a long-term plan to concentrate Putin's personal control over key segments of the system during the power transition, by placing loyal figures in the presidential administration, the State Council, the defence-industrial complex, and the security agencies.

'The children'

The issue of succession within Putin's elite warrants separate study. Here, however, it is examined mainly in practical terms – through the mechanisms of regime reproduction, especially in its final stage.

A group of 'children' has been gradually forming within Putin's elite. This represents those who were born in the 1970s through to the 1990s. Ignoring nominal posts and sinecures, the first significant appointments from this group date from the late 2000s.

- **Andrey Turchak** (b. 1975): governor of Pskov Region, 2009–2017; deputy chairman of the Federation Council and party boss of United Russia, 2017–2024;
- **Andrey Vorobyov** (b. 1970): governor of Moscow Region since 2012;
- **Ilya Shestakov** (b. 1978): head of Russian Fisheries since 2014.

The move into the organs of power by this first generation of 'children' often began in the United Russia party: Vorobyov was leader of the Central Executive Committee of the party (2005–2012), and Turchak was head of 'The Young Guard'.

The most common career trajectories among representatives of the 'second generation' of the elite are:

- a. Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO), the Foreign Ministry, university or college abroad, then a state-owned bank. This was the path taken by Pyotr Fradkov, Gleb Frank and Sergei Ivanov (although Ivanov did not study abroad);
- b. The FSB Academy, the Diplomatic Academy of the Foreign Ministry, then state service or work in a state company. This was the route taken by Pavel Fradkov, his classmate Andrei Patrushev (a captain in the FSB) and Dmitry Patrushev (an FSB lieutenant).

Many of them have a second qualification from the Higher School of Economics, the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA), or the Plekhanov Russian Economics University. A significant number possess academic qualifications or MBAs. Nearly all of them have worked in state-owned banks or in companies led by close associates of their fathers, then continued their careers in the state sector or in private business.

When the war began in Ukraine in 2014, along with Western sanctions and the confrontation with the West, 'the second generation of the elite' was divided. The sons of Vladimir Yakunin and Valentina Matvienko chose to base themselves in the West, while the majority of their peers either remained in Russia or even returned home from abroad. None of them have taken part in military action, unless the announcement by Yevgeny Prigozhin that

Nikolai Peskov, son of the presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov, served in the Wagner private military company is to be believed.³⁵

After the start of the full-scale war against Ukraine and the introduction of personal sanctions there was a noticeable redistribution of positions among the 'second generation'. The cohort born in the 1970s were given the opportunity to strengthen their positions, while those born in the 1980s seemed to be pushed out of the public eye. For instance, Sergei Ivanov

(b. 1980), Gleb Frank (b. 1982), Andrei Patrushev (b. 1981), and Yevgeny Shuvalov (b. 1993) disappeared from the scene. It is also worth mentioning the deaths in strange circumstances of Ivan Sechin (b. 1989) in February 2024, and of Konstantin Borisov (b. 1980) in August of the same year.

In 2024–2025 'the children' have been actively promoted to senior posts, from 52-year old Anna Tsivileva, to 36-year old Igor Chaika (the younger son of former Russian Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika). The president maintains personal contact with Anton Vaino, Andrei Vorobyov, Boris Kovalchuk, Andrei Turchak, Dmitry Patrushev, Pavel and Pyotr Fradkov, Ilya Shestakov, and, as mentioned, his niece, Anna Tsivileva. These members of 'the second generation' have occupied solid positions in both state service and business.

As well as 'the children', 'sons-in-law' have also been given senior positions. Sergei Tsivilev (b. 1961), the Energy Minister, is married to Putin's niece; Alexei Zakharov (b. 1971), the Deputy Prosecutor General, is married to Sergei Shoigu's daughter; Gleb Frank (b. 1982), a businessman, is married to Gennady Timchenko's daughter; Alexander Vinokurov (b. 1982), a major entrepreneur, is married to Sergei Lavrov's daughter.

However, while the status of 'son-in-law' can lead to a fast career rise, it can also lead to a sharp fall, if that status is lost. For example, Anatoly Serdyukov was removed from the post of defence minister after his divorce from Viktor Zubkov's daughter, and Kirill Shamalov lost much of his influence and his property after his divorce from Putin's daughter, Katerina Tikhonova.

'The children' of Putin's elite seem to be an instrument for turning their parents' political capital into personal resources, rather than part of a deliberate strategy by the regime to mould successors. The primary aim of 'the children' is less the preservation of the system than its use as a means of personal enrichment and the consolidation of their own positions. They remain a second generation of 'insiders', yet at the same time they are hostages of the regime: their standing is directly tied to their fathers' successes, failures, and eventual withdrawal from active politics.

'The youngsters'

Among the host of personnel appointments made since 2024 a group which stands out is that of young officials aged 50 or under. Some of them have been put in senior government positions: Anton Alikhanov (b. 1986), Mikhail Degtyaryov (b. 1981), Alexei Chekunkov (b. 1980), Andrei Nikitin (b. 1979), and Oxana Lut (b. 1979). Others have been appointed to the presidential administration: Maxim Oreshkin (b. 1982) and Kirill Dmitriev (b. 1975); a third group has been placed in businesses, such as Dmitry Bakanov (b. 1985).

Governors under the age of 50 from Putin's new cohort have been appointed to head State Council commissions, including Alexei Dyumin's protégé, Vyacheslav Fedorishchev (b. 1989), who has not yet turned forty. It is notable that many of the governors — Stanislav Voskresensky (b. 1976), Mikhail Kotyukov (b. 1976), Pavel Malkov (b. 1980), Aleksandr Tsybulsky (b. 1979), Alexei Tsydenov (b. 1976), and Andrei Chibis (b. 1979) — have already served as heads of federal agencies, deputy ministers, or even ministers in the federal government. This wave of appointees noticeably increased the number of young managers among the higher bureaucracy; however, this had hardly any effect on the officials' average age, which remains close to 59 (see Table 1).

What marks out this new generation of officials is their high level of education, and especially a background in economics. Their upward career path has not always been linked to state service; many of them began as entrepreneurs (Nikitin, Bakanov, Dmitriev, and Chekunkov). Many of the career bureaucrats have come through the Ministry of Economic Development.

Unlike the members of the previous generation, whose careers began in the Soviet period or under President Yeltsin, today's 'youngsters' have grown up in Putin's system. In this sense they can rightly be called 'the children of the regime'.

In recent times, the media has popularised the notion of 'Tikhonova's circle'.³⁶ This is an informal association of relatively young people from Putin's *nomenklatura* gathered around Putin's daughter, Katerina Tikhonova (b. 1986).

Tikhonova is the director of the Innopraktika foundation,³⁷ the founder of the Foundation for Technological Investment, and the co-chairperson of the coordinating committee for import substitution at the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

The president's assistants, Mironov and Dyumin, the head of the Federal Customs Service, Valery Pikalyov, the Minister for Emergency Situations, Alexander Kurenkov, the Deputy Defence Minister, Pavel Fradkov, the Governor of the Altai Republic, Andrei Turchak, and the Minister for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic, Alexei Chekunkov.³⁸ The 'Tikhonovites', who call for an adjustment of the current course and greater efficiency in the system, are said to draw their inspiration from the technocrat Andrei Belousov.

Different versions are put forward about who is in Tikhonova's circle.³⁹ Its composition is most often reconstructed by experts on the basis of their own assumptions, without sufficient factual evidence. The idea of a possible integration of Putin's adjutants with the generation of senior officials' children is itself open to doubt. On the whole, the representatives of the 'children's *nomenklatura*' carry out basic tasks within the bureaucratic apparatus. Unlike the adjutants, they are not involved in strategic decision-making, nor do they play an independent role in determining the future political system or the survival of the regime.

Repression against the elite as a form of ‘anaesthesia’

Official attacks on the elite have taken on a systemic character, and have noticeably increased since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This was the point where Putin created a new model of himself as a great leader, relying on the support of the public to circumvent the elite groups. Up until 2024 the number of attacks on the higher members of the *nomenklatura* remained relatively stable. But the severity of the sanctions which were imposed became stricter, and less evidence was needed to impose them. This meant that the fear of being attacked became greater, and the effectiveness of the repressive mechanism was preserved.

In 2024, however, repression became both more widespread and more severe.⁴⁰ If in the period from 2018–2023 the law-enforcement bodies had raised on average just two criminal cases per year against deputy leaders of the federal ministries and organisations, in 2024 alone ten such cases were raised.

A similar process has also been happening among the higher levels of regional officials. This report calculates that the number of officials who have been subjected to an official attack in recent years has increased by 2.5–3 per cent each year. The targeted officials include former governors, as well as deputy governors and mayors of regional capitals.

In 2024, 26 regional officials were arrested: one former governor; 22 deputy governors and deputy regional prime ministers; and three mayors. In the first seven months of 2025, 18 regional officials have been arrested: two former governors; 14 deputy governors; and two mayors. A significant number of those attacked are ‘yesterday’s people’ – those who have already retired. Persecuting them is a warning to others, without the risk of destabilising the system.

A new form of repression that became widespread in 2024 was the confiscation of property from regional oligarchs who hold, or more often formerly held, positions in the executive and representative branches of government. Until recently, being a member of parliament at the regional or especially the federal level granted a businessman immunity from prosecution; now, the combination of being a businessman and a politician is frequently a reason for a legal investigation and the subsequent nationalisation of a person’s assets.

Among the well-publicised examples are the nationalisation of the Rolf automobile dealership network,⁴¹ which belonged to Sergei Petrov, a former member of the State Duma, and the seizure of the South Urals Gold Company [Yuzhuralzoloto] from the deputy speaker of the Chelyabinsk legislative assembly, Konstantin Strukov.⁴²

The number of elite figures targeted by systematic political repression rose sharply in 2024, driven by the arrests of business leaders and members of the judiciary.

Repression against big business through property seizures has one key feature: the Kremlin-initiated redistribution of assets in favour of the 'second tier' of entrepreneurs is creating a new stratum of owners. Members of this group not only owe their wealth to the regime and to Putin personally, but also recognise that the preservation of the current political order is the sole guarantee of their capital's security.

The renewal of the business *nomenklatura* is taking place against the backdrop of a deteriorating economic situation. With this factor in mind, the Kremlin is seeking to replace the segment of the elite composed of temporary allies – who may distance themselves if circumstances change – with a group of figures whose loyalty is guaranteed by their personal dependence on the regime.⁴³

Conclusions

The changes in the Russian political system in 2024–2025 almost certainly point to the start of a transition aimed at transforming the regime while maintaining Putin’s power. The transition is planned to take place in the near future, with the 2030 elections seen as the point of its conclusion.⁴⁴

The State Council will play the central role in the transition scenario identified by this study. This body of presidential power ensures the coordinated interaction of public authorities, determines the basic direction of Russian internal policy, and sets the priorities for socio-economic development.

In the run-up to the end of Putin’s fourth term in 2024, there already was a discussion about the possibility of using the State Council, whose role has grown significantly since the constitutional reform of 2020, as a tool for maintaining Putin’s power after his term ended.

In the run-up to the end of Putin’s fourth term in 2024, there already was a discussion about the possibility of using the State Council, whose role has grown significantly since the constitutional reform of 2020, as a tool for maintaining Putin’s power after his term ended. However, the case of Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, who lost his authority soon after stepping down from the presidency in spite of retaining a number of senior state and party posts, became a warning.

Nevertheless, the State Council is gradually being endowed with new supervisory and managerial functions, allowing Putin, while stepping back from routine administration, to retain control over the entire system. These institutional changes are proceeding in parallel with a renewal of personnel, grounded in the ‘school of governors’ – not the official one created by Sergei Kiriyenko, but the actual practice of working in the regions.

Although Putin himself is unlikely to leave the presidency as a result of the transition, the institution of the ‘collective Putin’ may undergo significant change. The generation of Putin’s long-time associates is set to be replaced by the ‘children’ and ‘grandchildren’ who have known only Putin as president. Unlike their predecessors, they lack experience in the Soviet security services, are less bound to ideology, and are generally more pragmatic and cynical. In Putin’s design, this generational shift should result in the creation of a collective governance mechanism that both strengthens the leader’s capacity to rule and remains entirely subordinate to his directives.

Both the transition and its preparations carry inherent risks. Putin’s tightening of centralised control over the system’s key elements has tended to reduce their effectiveness. This has been particularly visible in moments of crisis, as shown by Yevgeny Prigozhin’s mutiny in 2023 or the Ukrainian incursion into Russia’s Kursk region in 2024.

Efforts to weaken the influence of corporate and clan-based groups inevitably provoke resistance, while political repression risks systemic paralysis or loss of control. An additional difficulty lies in the belated replacement of ineffective leaders, particularly within the security services.

The war in Ukraine and tensions with the West create both opportunities and risks for political transition: on the one hand, the wartime conditions enable freedom of manoeuvre without internal procedural constraints; on the other, they leave the system vulnerable to adverse external factors.

If Putin succeeds in rejuvenating the regime, the system may gain a second wind. If he fails, two scenarios are possible. In the first, the regime gradually unravels as the elite ages and attrition sets in, fuelled by conflicts between the 'old' and the 'new' groups; in this case, Putin would likely remain in office and outlast the regime itself. In the second, Putin is removed from power, whether by natural or external causes, while the regime survives and adapts, thereby outliving its founder.

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Endnotes

1. For example, Vyacheslav Lebedev, who had led the Supreme Court continuously since 1989, died in office on 23 February 2024 at the age of 80, following a prolonged illness. A little over a year after her appointment, Lededev's successor – Putin's university classmate Irina Podnosova – likewise died in office after a lengthy and serious illness.
2. 'Putin's adjutants' refers to a cohort of officers, mostly from the Federal Protective Service (FSO) and the Armed Forces, who served as the president's personal aides and in his personal protection team. Over time, several of them transitioned into senior political or administrative positions, forming a distinct network of trusted figures. These include Alexei Dyumin, Alexander Kurenkov, Dmitry Mironov, Valery Pikalyov, and Evgeny Zinichev.
3. 'National projects' are long-term state programmes launched by the Kremlin in 2018, covering areas such as healthcare, education, demographics, infrastructure, ecology, the digital economy, and regional development. They are framed as strategic initiatives to modernise Russia's economy and welfare system.
4. 'Overseers' [smotryashchie], an informal term from the criminal underworld for a crime boss's enforcers, is used in Russian political jargon to refer to individuals personally delegated by Vladimir Putin to oversee key state institutions and corporations. Their role goes beyond holding formal positions: they act as custodians of Kremlin interests, ensuring loyalty and political control. The following figures are identified as 'overseers': Irina Podnosova (Supreme Court; died in July 2025), Alexei Dyumin (State Council and defence-industrial complex), Anna and Sergey Tsivilev (Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Energy), Valery Pikalev (Federal Customs Service), Boris Kovalchuk (Accounts Chamber), and others.
5. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 129 of 10 March 2025 'On the Commission of the State Council of the Russian Federation on Support for Combat Veterans – Participants of the Special Military Operation and Their Families' [Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 10 марта 2025 года № 129 «О комиссии Государственного Совета Российской Федерации по вопросам поддержки ветеранов боевых действий – участников специальной военной операции и членов их семей»], Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet Portal of Legal Information], 10 March 2025, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202503100014?index=1>
6. This Council, established by presidential decree in 2018 as a coordinating body under Putin, is tasked with setting priorities for socio-economic development, overseeing the implementation of national projects, and shaping mechanisms of control over key development institutions.
7. Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects [Заседание Совета по стратегическому развитию и национальным проектам], Kremlin.ru, 6 June 2025, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/councils/by-council/1029/77115>
8. Government calculations project that 53.44 trillion roubles will be allocated to national projects over the new six-year term. Of this amount, 76.25 per cent (40.75 trillion roubles) is to be financed from the federal budget, while 23.75 per cent (12.69 trillion roubles) will come from extrabudgetary sources. See Expenditures on national projects and their key indicators until 2030 – in charts [Расходы на нацпроекты и их ключевые показатели до 2030 года – в графиках], Vedomosti, 23 March 2025, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2025/03/23/1098033-rashodi-na-natsproekti>

9. Composition of the Board of the Military-Industrial Commission of the Russian Federation as amended by Presidential Decree of 28 December 2024 No. 1123 [Состав коллегии Военно-промышленной комиссии Российской Федерации в редакции Указа Президента от 28 декабря 2024 года № 1123], Government of Russia, 28 December 2024, <http://government.ru/info/54199>
10. Federal Law No. 394-FZ of 8 December 2020 'On the State Council of the Russian Federation' [Федеральный закон от 8 декабря 2020 г. № 394-ФЗ «О Государственном Совете Российской Федерации»], Garant, 8 December 2020, <https://base.garant.ru/75016707>
11. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 22 July 2024 No. 613 'On the commissions of the State Council of the Russian Federation in the areas of socio-economic development' [Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 22 июля 2024 г. № 613 «О комиссиях Государственного Совета Российской Федерации по направлениям социально-экономического развития»], Kremlin.ru, 22 July 2024, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/50872>
12. Vyacheslav Fedorishchev, formerly Dyumin's first deputy during his tenure as governor of Tula region, assumed Dyumin's former post as chair of the State Council Commission on Industry. Dmitry Milyaev, who succeeded Dyumin as governor of Tula Region, was appointed chair of the State Council Commission on Physical Culture and Sport.
13. Schedule of meetings held by Alexei Dyumin:
25 July 2024 – Vyacheslav Fedorishchev, head of the State Council Commission on Industry;
21 August 2024 – Rustam Minnikhanov, head of the Commission on Infrastructure for Life;
18 November 2024 – meeting of the Commission on Tourism;
25 November 2024 – meeting with the chairmen of State Council commissions on the development of new national projects;
21 January 2025 – Dmitry Milyaev, head of the Commission on Physical Culture and Sport;
14 February 2025 – meeting of the Commission on Investment;
28 February 2025 – meeting of the Commission on the Northern Sea Route and the Arctic;
17 March 2025 – Gleb Nikitin, head of the Commission on Environmental Well-Being;
20 March 2025 – Igor Babushkin, head of the Commission on Support; for Combat Veterans – participants in the SMO and their families;
3 April 2025; 8 July 2025 – meetings of the Commission on Support; for Combat Veterans – participants in the SMO and their families;
20 June 2025 – meetings of the Commission on Personnel and the Commission on International Cooperation and Export;
27 June 2025 – meeting of the Commission on the Family.
14. In 2025, Nikitin was appointed Minister of Transport.
15. The Defence Ministry reported about the increase in the production of UAVs by the people's defence industry to 40 thousand per month, Izvestia, 21 December 2024, <https://en.iz.ru/en/1811698/2024-12-21/defense-ministry-reported-about-increase-production-uavs-peoples-defense-industry-40-thousand-month>

16. Belousov named 42 tasks for the Ministry of Defence [Белоусов назвал 42 задачи для Минобороны], RBC.ru, 16 December 2024,
<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/16/12/2024/676008de9a7947c448758b17>
17. Andrey Pertsev, Iron Commissar: the New Image of Andrei Belousov, *Riddle Russia*, 23 June 2024,
<https://ridl.io/iron-commissar-the-new-image-of-andrei-belousov>
18. The Diveyevo Brotherhood is an informal community of senior Russian officials and businessmen linked to the Seraphim-Diveyevo Monastery in Nizhny Novgorod Region. According to various sources, the Brotherhood brings together figures such as Mikhail Mishustin, Sergei Kiriyenko, Andrei Belousov, as well as representatives of big business who make regular pilgrimages and donations to the monastery. Membership in the Brotherhood entails demonstrative observance of Orthodox practices and symbolises affiliation with a religious-patriotic circle within the Russian elite.
19. 'Movement of the First' [Движение первых; Russian movement of children and youth] is a state-sponsored youth movement launched on 18 December 2022 by initiative of President Vladimir Putin, based on traditional Russian values, with over 11 million participants and modelled on the Soviet-era Pioneers.
20. United Russia submitted a record number of veterans to elections [«Единая Россия» отправит на выборы рекордное число ветеранов], Kommersant, 27 May 2025,
<https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7754700>
21. Dmitry Medvedev is still formally serving as chairman.
22. Strategy for the development of the shipbuilding industry until 2036 and in the longer-term perspective until 2050 [Стратегия развития судостроительной промышленности на период до 2036 года и на дальнейшую перспективу до 2050 года], Government of Russia,
<http://static.government.ru/media/files/lcRbgf2IkDV5TnMmASEyDG5FjYvT4r2p.pdf>
23. Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2050 [Энергетическая стратегия Российской Федерации на период до 2050 года], Government of Russia,
<https://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202504140013>
24. Strategy for the Development of the Russian Navy until 2050 [Стратегия развития Военно-морского флота Российской Федерации до 2050 года], 9 June 2025,
<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/09/06/2025/68466da89a7947bec3d905db>
25. List of instructions following the working trip to Murmansk [Перечень поручений по итогам рабочей поездки в Мурманск], Kremlin.ru, 16 May 2025,
<http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/76942>
26. Mistress of the Seas: What's New in the Kremlin's Geostrategic Ambitions and Priorities, NEST Centre, January 2025,
<https://nestcentre.org/mistress-of-the-seas-whats-new-in-the-kremlins-geostrategic-ambitions-and-priorities>
27. List of instructions following the trip to Sergiev Posad [Перечень поручений по итогам поездки в Сергиев Посад], Kremlin.ru, 17 September 2024,
<http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/assignments/orders/75133>
- 28.

28. The Sirius Centre was created to promote the development of children's talents and abilities, above all in those areas in which Russia has taken a leading position in the world: in the exact sciences – mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology; in art – classical ballet, painting, academic music, literary creativity; in sports – hockey, figure skating, chess.
See <https://sochisirius.ru/o-siriuse/programmes-of-the-educational-centre-sirius>
29. The principal national projects (in the order of approval): 'Means of Production and Automation' and 'Infrastructure for Life'; 'Long and Active Life' and 'Technological Support for Food Security'; 'An Efficient and Competitive Economy', 'Tourism and Hospitality', and 'The Data Economy and the Digital Transformation of the State'; 'New Health-Saving Technologies'; and under the national projects, 'New Atomic and Energy Technologies' and 'New Materials and Chemistry'; 'An Efficient Transport System' and 'Unmanned Aircraft Systems'; 'Environmental Well-Being' and 'Personnel'; 'International Cooperation and Export' and 'The Development of Space Activity'; 'Infrastructure for Life', and others.
30. Meeting of the Council for Strategic Development and National Projects [Заседание Совета по стратегическому развитию и национальным проектам], 6 June 2025, Kremlin.ru, <https://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/77115>
31. Informal structure of Russia's elite space: an experiment in network analysis [Неформальная структура элитного пространства России: опыт сетевого анализа], *Politeia*, No. 1 (104), 2022, pp. 72–91, <http://politeia.ru/files/articles/rus/Politeia-2022-1%28104%29-72-91.pdf>
32. For example, almost all representatives of the security agencies formed a cluster, yet horizontal links within the security bloc were virtually absent.
33. *Media* refers to the media-presence rating based on the list published by *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (see 100 Leading Politicians of Russia in April 2025 [100 ведущих политиков России в апреле 2025 года], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 May 2025, https://www.ng.ru/ideas/2025-05-05/7_9247_100.html).
Functional reflects the assessment of an individual's weight as a 'functionary' (meetings with Putin, assignments, and other indicators), according to the evaluation of NEST Centre experts.
34. The notion of the 'President Writ Large' ('Big President') refers to the institutional extension of presidential authority beyond the formal office of the head of state. It encompasses the wide constellation of agencies and actors that operate under the president's aegis, including the presidential administration, the Security Council, and affiliated supervisory and advisory bodies, thereby reflecting the diffuse but centralised nature of executive power in Russia. See *Power and Society in Russia: The Political Transformation Index*, NEST Centre, 7 July 2025, <https://nestcentre.org/power-and-society-in-russia-2025>
35. 'Just a simple artilleryman, knee-deep in shit': Prigozhin claims Putin spokesman Peskov's son served in Wagner Group 'manning an Uragan', *Meduza*, 21 April 2023, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2023/04/21/just-a-simple-artilleryman-knee-deep-in-shit-prigozhin-claims-putin-spokesman-peskov-s-son-served-in-wagner-group-manning-an-uragan>
36. Abbas Gallyamov, Children of the 'Putin political bureau' begin demanding change [Дети «путинского политбюро» начинают требовать перемен], *Point Media*, 1 July 2024, <https://pointmedia.io/story/668277d1dc48800406e0f480>

37. The board of trustees of the Foundation includes virtually all the heads of Putin's state corporations, among them Andrei Kostin, German Likhachev, Alexei Miller, Leonid Mikhelson, Igor Sechin, Alexander Tokarev, and Sergei Chemezov.
38. Envoy of the permafrost. Who is Mr. Dmitriev?
[Посланник вечной мерзлоты. Who is Mr. Dmitriev?], Novaya gazeta, 7 April 2025,
<https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2025/04/07/poslannik-vechnoi-merzloty-who-is-mr-dmitriev>
39. Children of Putin's Politburo Begin Demanding Change
[Дети «путинского политбюро» начинают требовать перемен],
<https://pointmedia.io/story/668277d1dc48800406e0f480>
40. Fabian Burkhardt et al., How Putin Rules Russia's Nomenklatura,
Russian Analytical Digest, No. 329, 28 July 2025
41. Russian court nationalises seized car dealership Rolf, Reuters, 21 February 2024,
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russian-court-nationalises-seized-car-dealership-rolf-2024-02-21>
42. Explainer: Konstantin Strukov, the Russian gold billionaire facing Russian asset seizure,
Reuters, 7 July 2025,
<https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/konstantin-strukov-russian-gold-billionaire-facing-russian-asset-seizure-2025-07-07>
43. Silence of the elites: Why today's nationalisation is more than just a redistribution of property [Молчание элит. Почему нынешняя национализация — больше, чем просто передел собственности], iStories, 29 July 2025,
<https://storage.googleapis.com/istories/opinions/2025/07/29/molchanie-elit-pochemu-nineshnyaya-natsionalizatsiya-bolshe-chem-prosto-peredel-sobstvennosti/index.html>
44. Putin's plans are liable to change; as a rule, he keeps several scenarios in reserve. Moreover, there is no guarantee that he will be able to implement his plans in full.



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