

Medvedev's Big Flub on 3rd Presidential Runner

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In an incredible act of political self-immolation, President Dmitry Medvedev said last week that he did not know who would run for president in 2012 and suggested that there might even be a third candidate in the race.

With this statement, he has all but tossed away the promising agenda of his presidency and turned himself into a political lame duck — more than a year ahead of schedule.

At best, Medvedev's words are a vivid display of the inept media advice that he is getting from his aides.

Since he has been hit with this question about his re-election plans so often, you would have thought that his advisers would have recommended a few standard answers that would not be politically damaging or embarrassing to the president.

The best-case scenario is that this was poor improvisation on Medvedev's part. He surely wants to run but does not want to reveal his plans too early in the game.

The worst-case scenario is that he really does not know who will run for president in 2012 because he has no say whatsoever on the issue.

In any event, Medvedev's statement sends a damaging message: The president does not care enough about the biggest item on his agenda — Russia's economic and social modernization — to fight for it in a general election. Who is going to believe in Russia's modernization — much less invest money in it — if the political father of the plan might step down at any moment?

This was a completely unnecessary blow to Medvedev's credibility. He could have easily dodged the question. Those who gave him this ridiculous line about a third candidate should be fired on the spot.

This sad episode demonstrates that the open question of whether Medvedev will run for a second term or yield to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin needs to be settled as soon as possible. The uncertainty is impeding Russia's development. The longer they keep the suspense, the more destabilizing the situation becomes.

There are only three good options available:

1. The tandem is preserved under Medvedev's second term.
2. Medvedev runs for president as the United Russia candidate, while Putin concludes that the country is in safe hands and retires to a less stressful life as United Russia chairman and National Leader.
3. Medvedev and Putin compete in a free election.

All other options, including the third candidate, could be disastrous.

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