Using Math to Save Medvedev

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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Putin visiting a school with Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, right, on Wednesday. **Alexei Druzhinin**

Young math buffs in St. Petersburg have to crack a math problem to prevent President Dmitry Medvedev from being fired by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

That's the challenge posed by Grigory Chikishev, a 21-year-old math tutor who coaches eighth graders at a St. Petersburg math club.

Chikishev, who says his main goal is to get children interested in math, included the Putin-fires-Medvedev scenario in an activity sheet that he hands out to the 13- and 14-year-olds who come to his municipally funded club to sharpen their math skills after school.

The problem that Chikishev devised goes as follows:

Vladimir Putin sets three double-digit numbers: a, b and c. Dmitry Medvedev has to give three numbers: X,Y, Z. After that, Putin will tell him the sum for: aX+bY+cZ. Medvedev has to guess the digits or will be fired from his presidential post. How he can save himself?

"This problem doesn't have any political meaning. I just used their names to get students interested," Chikishev said by telephone. "Mathematics and politics are two separate worlds."

In the real world, the prime minister cannot fire the president, who can only be removed by the parliament for treason or a serious crime. But the math problem echoes public opinion, which says Putin de-facto controls all power in the country.

But Chikishev, a die-hard math fan who is a fifth-year student at the Information Technology Institute, said he had no hidden agenda with the math problem and his students were paying no attention to its political inconsistency.

"They just didn't care," he said.

Chikishev said he also felt indifferent toward politics. "I don't really follow it unless it concerns me personally," he said.

But the math problem has created a storm of commentary on Russian blogs.

"We have to save Private Ryan, I mean President Medvedev," blogger Taho wrote.

Another blogger said, "Luzhkov failed to solve the problem," referring to Medvedev's decision to fire Mayor Yury Luzhkov in September.

Ironically, Medvedev himself might find it hard to solve the math problem. His math teacher Irina Grigovskaya told Komsomolskaya Pravda in 2007 that the future president barely got B's on his math tests in the eight, ninth and 10th grades.

So what is the solution to Chikishev's puzzler? Chikishev said Medvedev should choose increasing multiples of 10, so each of the two-digit numbers Putin gave can be distinguished in the sum, such as 100, 10,000 and 1 million.

Nine of the 13 schoolchildren who have attempted the problem at the math club have solved it, a tutor said by telephone Thursday.

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