

WikiLeaks May Increase Kremlin Clan Infighting

By [Vladimir Frolov](#)

December 12, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

It is hard to believe that Julian Assange, founder of the WikiLeaks web site, ever intended to meddle in Russian politics, particularly in its most sensitive part — the presidential succession of 2012.

But this could be the result after WikiLeaks published secret diplomatic cables from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, some dealing with the “tandem politics” in ways that shatter the facade of unity among the Putin and Medvedev elites.

They expose the rivalry and simmering hatred between the clans around Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev and the splitting loyalties of the Russian pundits and business interests.

Medvedev’s camp comes across as almost openly agitating for U.S. support of their boss’s presidential run while making no secret of its disdain for Putin.

The cables' analytical angle portrays the U.S. Embassy as quietly rooting for Medvedev, sometimes lamenting that his "unilateral routes to re-election are becoming narrower as he avoids taking destabilizing steps, such as firing senior Putin loyalists or changing the political system." (This cable was written before Medvedev fired Mayor Yury Luzhkov.)

U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle comes across as the voice of reason in the cables when he advocates courting Medvedev while engaging with Putin, "who will continue to have a significant say in Russian affairs for the foreseeable future, regardless of his formal position."

The cables' exposure is likely to intensify the infighting between the political clans who advocate a Medvedev or Putin option in 2012.

Medvedev's camp appears to be emboldened by the U.S. tacit support, while Putin's circle is struck by the degree of elite disloyalty made evident in the embassy reporting.

It is certainly no coincidence that Medvedev's economic adviser, Arkady Dvorkovich, veered widely off the economic terrain in his recent interview with the BBC to state explicitly that Medvedev wants to run in 2012. It is a calculated signal to the Russian elites, particularly in business, to endorse Medvedev for president in the next election.

The ideal could be to transform the now obvious Medvedev-

Putin competition from a behind-the-scenes affair into a more open political debate on the country's future course, making the system more pluralistic and flexible.

The downside for Medvedev could be that he might face a different competitor in 2012 who enjoys Putin's backing.

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