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Mironov Loses Power and Putin Gains More

By Vladimir Frolov

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Even as President Dmitry Medvedev mulls over a re-election bid, here is what I am willing to bet will happen in the 2012 vote.

On May 18, United Russia deputies in the St. Petersburg city legislature will strip Sergei Mironov, Federation Council speaker, of his mandate and top government job. This will ensure that A Just Russia fails to cross the 7 percent threshold in the December State Duma elections. (Mironov, who owes everything to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, sealed his fate three weeks ago when he announced that A Just Russia would not support Putin if United Russia nominated him to run for president.)

Mironov's imminent ouster presages a larger plan for 2012.

The demise of A Just Russia is necessary to retain United Russia's constitutional super-majority of more than 300 members in the Duma (it currently has 315 of the 450 seats), which

in this year's elections only becomes feasible if just three parties make it to the Duma — United Russia, the Communist Party and the Liberal Democratic Party.

This super-majority is Putin's lock on Russia's political system.

Killing A Just Russia would also deny Medvedev a political vehicle for a totally independent presidential run. Plans to create such a vehicle out of the decomposing Right Cause party by embedding it with First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov foundered when Shuvalov bowed out after learning that the latest Levada poll put the Right Cause barely above 1 percent.

After the Duma election, A Just Russia would be the only party that could nominate Medvedev for president independently of Putin. The Communists and the Liberal Democratic Party wouldn't dare do this.

Without a national party behind him, Medvedev remains a loner who can't secure a political base of his own. As political strategist Yelena Miskova told me, "Medvedev would be running as a Don Quixote fighting the windmills of corruption and protecting Lady Modernization all alone."

With his Duma super-majority secured, Putin would nominate Medvedev for a second presidential term as United Russia's candidate. He would then put forward someone else as Medvedev's next prime minister. This is part of Putin's conception of a gradual, not rapid, modernization.

Putin would maintain control, while Medvedev gets his second term without much authority. But would he want it?

In reality, yes. This is Russia's change you can believe in.

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