

Taking Russia From Good to Great

By [The Moscow Times](#)

March 05, 2012



The only surprise of Sunday's presidential election came when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin openly wept as he declared himself victor before a crowd of tens of thousands of people on Manezh Square shortly after polls closed in Moscow. During his 12 years in power, Putin has carefully crafted a reputation as a stoic macho man. Even during horrific tragedies like the Dubrovka and Beslan terrorist attacks, he never shed a tear in public. But on Sunday night he wept.

"I promised you we would win. We have won. Glory to Russia!" Putin said, wiping away tears. "We won in an open and fair struggle."

Nobody had doubted that Putin would win by a landslide after recent opinion polls predicted he would place well over 60 percent. So why was Putin weeping?

Some might dismiss the tears as a cheap performance by a KGB-trained actor. Others might say that the weeks of unprecedented opposition protests, which stunned Putin and his veteran advisers, had taken their toll, and Putin was genuinely savoring the moment. Putin himself said early Monday that the tears were caused by the bitterly cold wind.

In any case, talk has been rife about the possible emergence of a Putin 2.0 after the election, and maybe — just maybe — we caught a glimpse of that on Sunday night.

But emotions are the least of what Putin needs if he wants to succeed in a third term. Putin can take pride in his legacy of leading the country out of the chaotic 1990s through the stable and prosperous 2000s. But he has a more daunting task ahead: to convince foreigners and Russians alike that Russia is not only a good place to live but a great place to invest. Here are four things he should consider:

1. Give the people a voice. Investors are looking for any sign of instability that might impact their activities, and massive street protests are a cause for concern. Putin can take to heart that the opposition protests, while unprecedented in size, have attracted a relatively small percentage of the general population. It is also fortunate that the rallies have not escalated into violence.

Nonetheless, a Pandora's box has opened that Putin will not be able to snap shut. The protests signal that many members of the middle class are fed up with government lies and corruption, and this dissatisfaction is directly linked to their lack of say in government. No matter how many votes are ultimately awarded to Putin, he should not behave like he has an ironclad mandate to rule. He should push ahead with reforms initiated by President Dmitry Medvedev to ease the election laws and allow opposition parties to register and play an active role in the electoral process and government.

2. Create a level playing field. In the 1990s, foreign investors complained that Russians — particularly those who were politically connected — had all the advantages in doing business here. Now the tables have turned. It is the well-connected foreign investors who are prospering, and those who encounter corruption are able to call Putin or other senior government officials to put a stop to it.

Smaller foreign investors may not have the same political pull, but they can turn to organizations like the American Chamber of Commerce in Russia or the Association of European Businesses to solve their problems.

Most Russian entrepreneurs, however, are forced to give bribes and engage in other forms of corruption to survive, and those tired of the business climate leave Russia. Russia's oil dominated economy will not prosper until all businesses are allowed to play on a level field, and Putin needs to strengthen Medvedev's lackluster fight on corruption to make this possible.

3. Select wise and knowledgeable advisers. Putin had little say about his advisers when he rose to the presidency in 2000. His anointment by a shadowy Kremlin clan in 1999 determined to protect their own interests is well documented, as was his decision to betray his benefactor Boris Berezovsky. But more than a decade later, Putin has no excuse for retaining corrupt advisers.

Putin, who despite his flaws is inarguably a decisive leader who deeply loves Russia, is no doubt doing all that he can to make sure the country succeeds — even if it means serving what promises to be six grueling years in the Kremlin. But a leader is only as good as his team and, unfortunately, some people in Putin's team have offered advice meant to only advance their

own wealth, not the prosperity of the country.

In his government, where officials tend to swap seats rather than welcome new blood, Putin could face a problem selecting the best advisers. But perhaps this would be a good time for him to dust off the "Golden 100" and "Golden 1000" cadre reserve lists that Medvedev drafted early in his presidency. Those vetted pools of job candidates might yield some sound choices.

4. Take your leadership up a notch. Putin likes to point to Franklin D. Roosevelt as an example when he promotes the notion of multiple presidential terms. But the U.S. president whom Putin should study is Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was a patriot who sought what he thought was best for his country.

Lincoln also pursued a clear and compelling vision and didn't shy away from tough decisions, author Jim Collins wrote in "Good to Great," his best-selling book on leadership that examines chief executives who took good-performing companies and turned them into superstars.

Lincoln and the successful CEOs all shared one essential trait — they were "level 5 leaders," which Collins defines as people with "a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will."

This is the kind of leader who not only prioritizes his country and its future but also puts those goals ahead of his own career and personal interests. This is the leader who paves the way for a country's long-term prosperity so its success will remain sustainable long after he leaves office.

Putin has proven himself to be a decisive, patriotic leader. But this is the next level of leadership that Putin should strive to attain and that Russians and foreign investors need.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/03/05/taking-russia-from-good-to-great-a13063>