The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Open Season Declared To Discredit Medvedev

By Vladimir Frolov

February 17, 2013



Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's status is being upgraded from "damaged goods" to "fair game." The knives are aimed at him, and if he doesn't push back forcefully enough his future will be very bleak.

It's now deemed insufficient to have Medvedev's "modernization presidency" quietly erased. His policies of somewhat relaxed freedom and somewhat more political competition have been reversed, his signature initiatives publicly ridiculed and revised, and his supporters have been marginalized.

The objective has shifted to getting Medvedev politically discredited, personally humiliated and even scapegoated for all of the nation's problems.

In a sign that anything goes now, a slickly produced YouTube video attacks Medvedev for his acquiescence to NATO's air campaign against Libya in 2011. It accuses Russia's third president

of betraying the nation's interests in a conspiracy with the U.S. and NATO, tantamount to a charge of high treason. An earlier ghost movie shown on YouTube accused Medvedev of criminal procrastination at the start of the 2008 Georgia's invasion of South Ossetia, blaming him for the deaths of Russian peacekeepers.

It is stunning that Medvedev is not demanding an investigation or filing charges of libel, which has now been returned to the Criminal Code. He must be aware that homemade videos could now make for court evidence.

The rationale behind these attacks is to utterly destroy Medvedev as a realistic alternative to Putin. After all, he is still living proof that Russia could do fine without Putin in the Kremlin. He is also the only senior figure in office who says he may run for president again.

The campaign's immediate objective is to force Putin to fire Medvedev. The prime minister automatically becomes acting president if the president is incapacitated. Another objective is to discourage Medvedev from a presidential challenge in 2018 and to destroy his credibility among supporters and potential donors. The business groups close to Medvedev are already being squeezed. Medvedev got the message and announced he would never run against Putin.

This could be a fatal mistake. Medvedev can try to survive this attack by maintaining ambiguity over his presidential plans and by advancing positions that challenge the most absurd policies initiated by the Kremlin. This is the only way for him to keep his status as a credible alternative to Putin and prevent his humiliating dismissal. Displaying fealty now is the surest path to annihilation.

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