

Putin Must Focus on Thinking Long-Term

By [Vladimir Frolov](#)

August 02, 2015



With President Vladimir Putin engrossed in matters of history, religion, geopolitics and war, a sense of strategic drift is unnerving the nation's elites. With all the patriotic consolidation around Putin, there is no effort to define a long-term vision for the country.

In his public statements Putin sounds more interested in glorifying Russia's past than in charting a course for the nation's future. He is largely indifferent to his 2012 campaign pledges, which now require a major revision in vastly changed circumstances.

If the policy goals he was elected to implement are no longer relevant, and new objectives are not being formulated, it creates a crisis of political legitimacy with the rationale for Putin's presidency dissipating.

The sky-high ratings have numbed his political sensitivities to allow for policies that look ill-conceived and even distasteful. The legally dubious decision to move the 2016 parliamentary elections by three months gives the Kremlin no political advantage while betraying an inner

sense of insecurity and weakness.

The disgraceful plan to destroy embargoed food from Europe flies in the face of Orthodox values and the public sentiment traumatized by a history of famine, war and Soviet scarcity. This tone-deaf decision and the widely publicized lavish wedding of the president's spokesman combine to create Russia's "let them eat cake" moment. The president's excessive ratings are turning into a source of political instability. The desire to maintain the current consolidation around Putin pushes the Kremlin to deny access to viable political alternatives even at the regional and local levels of government.

This is the logic behind the decision to deny registration to the Democratic Coalition for the 2015 regional legislative elections. While the technical goal is to deny the Parnas opposition party the legal way to field candidates in the 2016 Duma elections without collecting signatures, the fear seems to be that election results may not confirm the stratospheric levels of pro-Putin support, undermining the regime's survival strategy.

Instead of deflating the pressure for change by co-opting its agents into the legal political process, the policy is to eliminate any legitimate manifestation that such a clamor exists. The desire "to maintain the stratospheric ratings" at the cost of political legitimacy may fuel instability.

The strategic drift is debilitating. A sense of strategic purpose and direction needs to be restored soon.

Vladimir Frolov is president of LEFF Group, a government relations and PR company.

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

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/08/02/putin-must-focus-on-thinking-long-term-a48684>