

Kremlin Puppet Master Surkov Distracts Public with Putin Panegyric

Vladislav Surkov's job has always been to get people talking about everything except what's real.

By [Sam Greene](#)

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Vladislav Surkov **Alexei Druzhinin / TASS**

On Feb. 11, the ill-reputed Vladislav Surkov, now personal advisor to President Vladimir Putin on Ukraine, published another magnum [opus](#) that will almost surely have the pundits hopping. In the spirit of public service, then, here's a preemptive debunking: Surkov's a shill.

The former first deputy chief of the presidential administration rose to international prominence in 2006 as the leading Kremlin ideologist when he penned the term "sovereign democracy."

The argument of his piece, in a nutshell, is that Russia isn't a democracy (surprise!). Never

has been, never will be. And, of course, there aren't really any democracies at all. Choice is an illusion. Everywhere and always.

Western societies work, he says, because they let people revel in that illusion. But the fiction has never really worked in Russia, which has tied itself into knots trying to maintain it.

But — and here's the kicker — Russia doesn't need the fiction, because it has Putin. Putin has built a system capable of ruling Russia for 100 years. Why? Because that system understands its people. From top to bottom, right to left, inside and out.

In Surkov's view, Putin is Russia's Sigmund Freud, Dr Ruth Westheimer and Jewish grandmother all rolled into one. He knows what you want, what you need and what's good for you. And, in fact, so do the rest of the people Putin has running the country. And the system as a whole.

Never mind that there's no evidence for this whatsoever. Putin is popular — though less than he once was — but his governance is not popular. Russians, by and large, do not think he rules in their interest. Russian citizens may agree that they have little choice, but that agreement is begrudging, not grateful. And Surkov almost certainly knows that. He reads the [polls](#), too.

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So before we go all in for “Putin's stooge says the country's a happy monarchy” headlines, let's stop to consider what's actually going on here. Surkov's playing games. It's what he does.

What, you actually thought the man who insists that politics is a game of smoke and mirrors had finally decided to tell the truth, come clean on behalf of his boss, idol and tsar?

Surkov's job (or one of his jobs, since he ostensibly also runs Russia's affairs in/around Ukraine) is and always has been to get people talking about everything except what's real. He's the bait in the bait-and-switch.

So, instead of focusing on the difficult policy questions facing the Kremlin (including how to justify spending on infrastructure rather than social services), we can spend the next few days (or weeks!) talking about Russia's political system. Or, thanks to Surkov's missive, instead of focusing on 2019, we can set our sights on 2024. Because, I mean, why not? What could possibly be more important?

This has been a public service announcement. We now return you to your regularly scheduled programming. Have a nice day.

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