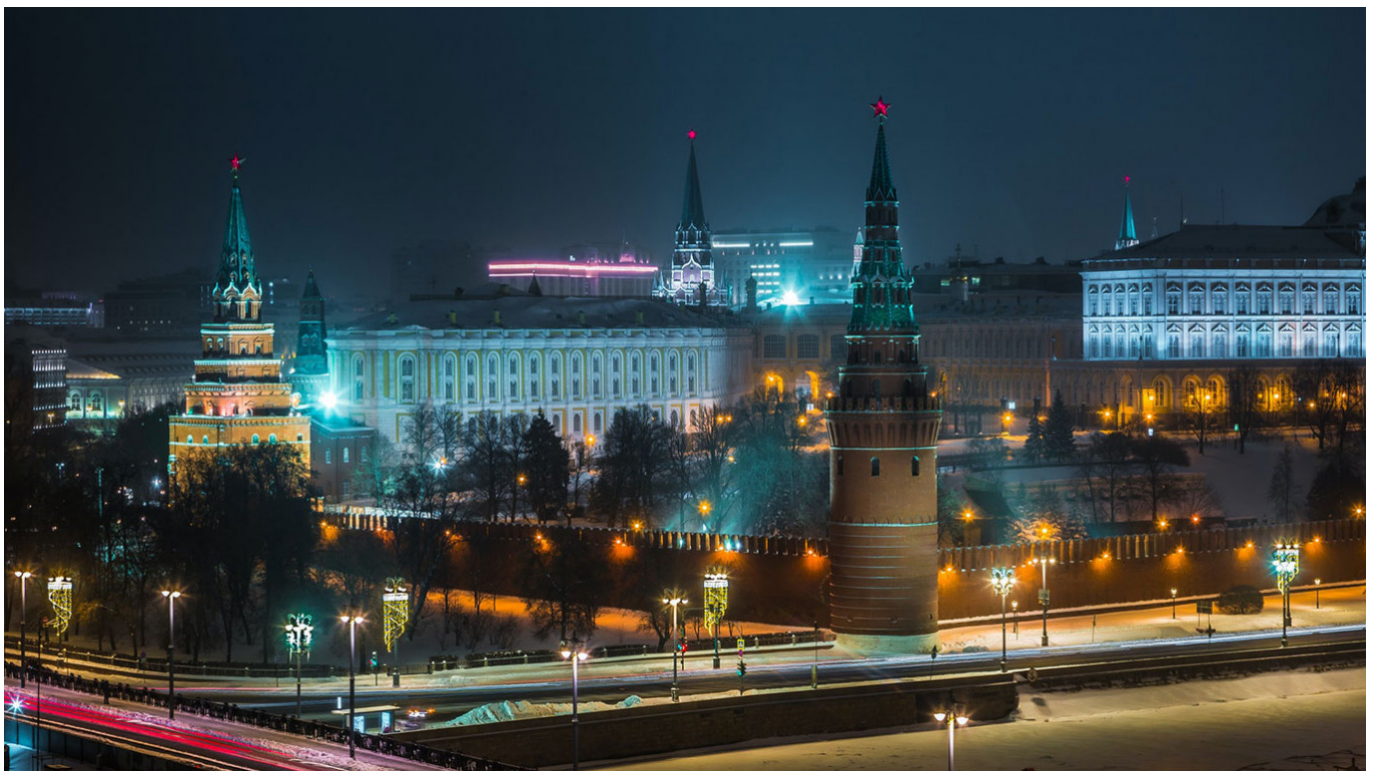


# And Putin Stands Alone

**A leader without support will fall. It is a question of when, not if.**

By [Andrei Zubov](#)

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**Dmitry Trepolsky/ pexels**

Apart from all the horrors we see in the theater of the fratricidal Russian-Ukrainian war — a name that will go down in history — and the fears that torment us at home every minute, I want to get an overall sense of the situation.

Any society is like a pyramid in how close people are to the leadership and how they can influence it. But in democracies the pyramid is flat, with a sharp angle of the base and an obtuse angle of the top, while in personified autocracies (absolute monarchies, tyrannies) there is a very sharp angle at the top and the base angles are only slightly below 90 degrees. Our society is a typical example of this kind of elevated autocratic pyramid.

About 80% of the population is its base. These are usually people who live modestly or are simply poor. They get their view of the world from television rather than the Internet; they either have never traveled abroad or are happy on the private beaches of Egypt, Turkey,

Tunisia, and Hainan. They are naturally anti-American, even though they have never been to America. This anti-Americanism is borne of envy since they know very little. Often their picture of the world is wrapped up in conspiracy theories, pseudo-history, and other strange notions. They are passive, and although they are now dissatisfied with their lives, they are generally obedient to authority.

In the present circumstance, for the most part these people — about 70% — support Putin's war in the Ukraine. They believe in the bloodthirsty anti-Russian "Bandera-ites" and the evil West that Russia opposes. But they aren't fanatic about it.

They would prefer not to send their children to war, and they'd like to avoid the hardships of war. There are very few people who are enthusiastic. The ones who volunteer to fight do it out of poverty and despair because their lives are unfulfilled.

The second level of the pyramid is 18-19% of the population. These are well-educated and cultured people who widely use the Internet, go abroad and know the world well. Many of them have sources of income independent of the government. Others, to the contrary, work in state corporations and the bureaucracy, serving the leaders but not part of them. These people are often, but not always, wealthy. They might even have a small house in Latvia or Bulgaria, or even an apartment on what they call "Lazurka" — the Cote d'Azur. These people have a clear understanding of the world, and many of them have strong moral principles and value freedom. Others, on the contrary, sell their talent to the authorities and, in exchange for their silence, receive handsome salaries in universities, bureaucracies, and businesses associated with the leadership. Among this group, about 70% disapprove of the current war, which they state publicly in one way or another. Quite a few people in this group are shocked by the latest events and are changing their loyalty to the authorities to moral opposition to them, resigning from public office, state mass media, etc. Not all loyalists do this, however. Actress Chulpan Khamatova is an example of the protesting majority in this group, while conductor Valery Gergiev is an example of the loyal minority.

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Finally, the tip of the pyramid — 1-2% of the population — is the spot for the main beneficiaries of the current Russian system. These people are fully devoted to the authorities. They are also well-educated and understand everything, they don't have apartments but mansions in the West along with large deposits in foreign banks (from Switzerland to the UAE) and jobs in international business. These are officials of the highest rank, heads of state corporations, the so-called deputies of the Duma and the Federation Council, governors, and multiple-star generals of the army, the FSB, the GRU. They sold their freedom to Putin, and in exchange they received rich and carefree lives. They are unconditional executors of his will — not for ideological reasons, but for purely selfish reasons. Among them are ideologues like Dugin and Vaino, but there aren't many of them. And most importantly, they have different ideas, and they try to implement them through their "access to the man."

Now terror and frustration reigns in this "elite" group. The main words you hear in the offices of the Kremlin, Lubyanka and the Presidential Administration on Old Square are "they deceived us."

With the Russian-Ukrainian war, Putin has put an end to their *dolce vita*, making their money and villas in the best places of the world inaccessible and demanding even more loyalty from them. Meanwhile, their complicity makes many of them war criminals who will stand trial in the Hague. That wasn't their deal with Putin. On top of it all, they face the specter of a Greater Terror if the current regime, rejected by the whole world, continues its aggression — or the prospect of being reduced to nuclear ash. This is not the future envisioned by these owners of yachts, collections of Rolls-Royces and Lamborghinis, masterpieces of painting and cozy villas among the vineyards of Tuscany.

These people stopped being loyal to Putin at one point. Why would they want to lose everything they've gained, and even their very lives? Without them, Putin is no longer a great tyrant, but just an old man hiding in a bunker. He could even press that infamous red button, so cleverly portrayed in “Charlie Hebdo,” but now no one will carry out his order. A few fanatics don't count. They will simply be isolated, just like the tyrant who made the mistake.

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Putin cannot appeal to the next stratum — it is either against him or loyal to him for the same reason as the elite and will abandon him along with the elite.

Putin cannot appeal to the people — he is anything but a people's leader. The people, even if they sympathize with him, will not follow him. They are passive and get along with their television sets, not a revolution.

If Putin had won the war in Ukraine in two days and the West had not imposed crushing sanctions, he would have retained the loyalty and even mystical devotion of the elite, like Hitler in 1939-41, and the full support of the people. The intelligentsia would have been split and isolated.

Putin lost the war, failed to carry out his blitzkrieg, and got bogged down in the March mud of the Ukrainian Black Earth. The sanctions were indeed devastating, just as old President Biden promised.

Putin stands alone. This is not Iran, where the Ayatollah regime was established as a result of a popular religious revolution (like the Bolshevik regime in Russia in 1917-22). And it's not North Korea, where a popular anti-colonial war turned into despotism. Russia has had thirty years of boring, idea-less kleptocracy.

Putin cancelled the kleptocracy. He can no longer be its leader, he has disgraced himself before the whole world, which considers him a dangerous war criminal with signs of mental illness. They will hand him over in the near future. It will be up to the new leader to restore the “beautiful life” of the pyramid, restore relations with the West, get accounts in foreign banks unblocked, and have their assets released. The best person to do this is someone not tainted

by the current crimes, in fact ideally someone who has loudly denounced them, but who comes from their milieu, a person who can make a deal with them.

Therefore, we are not threatened by a new Stalinism, or the Iranian path, or the North Korean path. The masses of Russia are silent and there will be no revolution. But there will be — and very, very soon — a coup at the very top, like Khrushchev's ouster in 1964, or the death of Emperor Paul on September 11, 1801, or the strange death of Stalin in March 1953. But it will be done in order to restore relations with the West, with the approval and moral support of the middle, active stratum of the population. And it will be done with the restoration of democracy and civil liberties.

And we can expect this in the coming days, and much of it in the coming weeks.

I remain an optimist.

*Translated from Facebook.*

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

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