Recent biographies of Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin illuminate their path to the Kremlin and how they became rulers of the once Soviet Union and now Russia. For all three men the path from the provinces (in Putin’s case St. Petersburg) to Moscow is similar. A combination of the patronage of powerful men in the Kremlin from their provinces, the exchange of favors with Kremlin functionaries, and personalities and characteristics admired by influential men brought Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin to power.

In her book about life in Russia during the 1930’s, Shelia Fitzpatrick wrote:

In the Soviet Union, for all its apparent bureaucratization, many things actually functioned on a personal basis… To get privileges, you needed contacts with someone higher up: in short you needed a patron. Patronage relations were ubiquitous in Soviet society.

The practice of patronage… was characteristic… of all Soviet leaders… They all tried to have “their own” people working for them – people who were personally loyal, associate their interests with their boss’s, relied on him as a patron…

In the Soviet system status and power was “inseparable from the man in charge”. Those in power surrounded themselves with “family”, “political clients, subordinates, and associates from whom they expected loyalty…” and in return offered them privileges and protection. Fitzpatrick also described blat, a system of exchanging favors in the Soviet Union based on the principle of reciprocity. Blat was usually described in terms of friends helping friends but really meant “… you had to have something for somebody in return”. Obtaining shoes, clothes, a better work assignment, university admission, supplies for a factory… was facilitated by blat. One hand washed the other.¹

Fitzpatrick’s description of patronage and “favor” sharing in Stalin’s Russia was the same system that helped bring Gorbachev, Yeltsin and Putin to power. By understanding how they reached the Kremlin it becomes clear that Putin’s rise to become Russia’s president was not the result of an “accident of fate” or a scheme by Russia’s security services or even surprising. Instead he followed a time-honored path to power.

Mikhail Gorbachev was born and raised in a small village in the Stavropol Region of the North Caucus in the former Soviet Union. There he began his climb through the region’s Communist party ranks. His rise was facilitated by Fyodor Kulakov, the First Secretary of the Stavropol Region’s Communist Part from 1960-1964. In 1961 he promoted Gorbachev to lead Stavropol’s regional Komsomol and continued to promote him through regional party ranks.

The Stavropol Region is blessed with numerous health spas and resorts featuring mineral and medicinal waters, and healing mud baths. During the Soviet period Communist party leaders and high level government officials from Moscow regularly vacationed in Stavropol. Gorbachev as part of his party duties would make it a point to greet visiting dignitaries. This is how he met Yuri Andropov in 1969, who was also from Stavropol and was then Chairman of the Committee for State Security (KGB), when he was vacationing with his wife at a resort in the region. They quickly became friends, and Gorbachev and his wife Raisa regularly vacationed together with the Andropov’s in the resorts of the Caucus. Andropov would be decisive in Gorbachev’s rise to power.

What made Gorbachev so appealing to powerful men like Kulakov and Andropov? Gorbachev was the opposite of the typical coarse, hard-drinking party functionary. He attended the elite Moscow University where he received a law degree. Gorbachev was well-read and could discuss Marxist-Leninist doctrine with the ease of an academic. He was moderate in his drinking, sophisticated, cultured and energetic. His wife Raisa was appealing and charming.

In 1964 Kulakov was promoted to head the Central Committee’s Agriculture Department in Moscow.² By 1971 he was a member of the Politburo and a close confidant of Leonard Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the CPSU.³ Kulakov did not forget Gorbachev. The two

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² Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The governing body of the CPSU
³ The highest policy making authority of CPSU
men kept in regular contact. In 1970 Gorbachev was selected the First Secretary of the Stavropol Region’s Communist Party with the assistance of Kulakov from Moscow. He was 39-years old when he was selected to be First Secretary. Gorbachev’s “youth” and “energy” would become an important factor in his rapid promotions through the ranks of the CPSU.

First Secretary Gorbachev distinguished himself with the completion of several major projects including an irrigation canal project that brought water to Andropov’s village. In 1977 Kulakov asked for Gorbachev’s help in bringing in a record grain harvest in the Stavropol Region. Gorbachev successfully worked to ensure a record harvest was delivered to the state. General Secretary Brezhnev recognized Gorbachev as one of the “new young leaders” who had “big, statesman-like ideas about issues of national importance.” In 1978 he was called to Moscow and appointed as Central Committee Secretary in charge of agriculture. Two years later he was a member of the Politburo whose members had a median age in the mid 70’s. They were the “Brezhnev Generation”, the political elite who rose to prominence during Stalin’s Great Purge.

In November 1982 Leonard Brezhnev died almost a complete invalid after a series of strokes and heart attacks. He was immediately succeeded as General Secretary by Yuri Andropov, a member of the Politburo and head of the KGB, who also was very sick. In August 1983 Andropov entered a hospital with kidney failure where he remained until he died in January 1984. He made it clear he wanted Gorbachev to replace him as General Secretary but was outmaneuvered by party functionaries. In February 1984 he was followed as General Secretary by Konstantin Chernenko who was also sick with advanced emphysema, heart failure and cirrhosis of the liver. By the end of 1984 he could not leave his hospital room and died in March 1985. After three years of leadership by sick and dying old men (a commentator described them as “geriatric zombies”), the Party was ready for the youthful (54-years old) and energetic (not terminally ill) Mikhail Gorbachev. In March 1985 the Central Committee Plenum made him General Secretary of the CPSU. And so began the end of the Soviet Union.

Boris Yeltsin was born in the Sverdlovsk Oblast in the Urals and began his party career there. He studied construction engineering at a local Polytechnic. After graduating, he quickly

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worked his way up the city of Sverdlovsk’s (renamed Yekaterinburg in 1991) bureaucracy for residential construction. Yeltsin accomplishments in meeting residential apartment construction targets came to the attention of Yakov Ryabov, a party functionary who became the First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk Oblast Communist Party in 1971. Yeltsin had a reputation of being headstrong and abrasive. He was described as being high powered, assertive, and strong willed with a “nose for publicity”. In April 1968 Ryabov recruited him into the regional party apparatus. Ryabov had been told “He (Yeltsin) will carry out what leadership assigns him to do.”

In 1976 Ryabov left for Moscow where he became the Central Committee secretary responsible for supervising the Soviet defense industry. Ryabov lobbied Brezhnev to replace him with Yeltsin. He believed Yeltsin had the “iron grip” and strong will needed to the job. In 1976, Yeltsin became First Secretary of the Sverdlovsk Oblast Communist Party. Those who worked for Yeltsin when he was First Secretary later said his criteria for selecting party officials was good training, knowledge of work and devotion to him, Yeltsin. While in Moscow on party business he kept in regular contact with former officials from Sverdlovsk working in the Kremlin.  

Yeltsin came the attention of Yuri Andropov, then Chairman of the KGB, when overnight in September 1977 he implemented the Politburo directive to raze the Ipat’ev House in the city of Sverdlovsk as part of a “planned reconstruction”. Bolsheviks murdered Tsar Nicholas II and his family in the cellar of that house in 1918. Moscow was concerned the execution site was attracting both Soviet and foreign tourists and might become a shrine to the murdered Tsar.7 In January 1984, Andropov, now General Secretary CPSU, sent Yegor Ligachev, the organizational secretary for the Central Committee, to Sverdlovsk to “have a look” at Yeltsin. Ligachev was impressed by Yeltsin’s vigor and decisiveness. The First Secretary was a man who thought big and knew “how to get things done”. 8 Ligachev proposed Yeltsin be appointed head of the Central Committee’s construction department. Andropov died though before the position was offered Yeltsin. When Gorbachev became General Secretary,  

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6 Colton, see pp. 77-84.
7 Colton, pp. 89-90.
8 Colton, p. 208.
Ligachev convinced him to bring Yeltsin to Moscow. Gorbachev knew Yeltsin and was “leery” of him. Yeltsin had squabbled with emissaries from the Central Committee’s Agricultural Committee concerning problems in Sverdlovsk. Gorbachev noted that Yeltsin had made an inadequate response to criticism from the Central Committee on agricultural problems. He had also seen a wobbly Yeltsin being helped out of a Supreme Soviet session on someone’s arm and thought Yeltsin had been drinking. Gorbachev though ignored his misgivings and the advice of Nicolai Ryzhkov, head of the Central Committee’s Economic Department, who warned him not to promote Yeltsin. Ryzhkov told Gorbachev, “He’ll bring you grief. I know him and I don’t recommend him.”

Within three months Yeltsin (July 1985) was promoted to Secretary of the Central Committee for Construction and Capital Investment. Gorbachev and Ligachev supported his appointment by describing Yeltsin’s energy, experience and knowledge of the construction industry. Gorbachev later wrote in his memoirs, “We were looking everywhere to ‘spy out’ people who were active, unhesitating and responsive to new things. Not many of them were nearby, in the upper stratum. Yeltsin impressed me.” Six months later Yeltsin was appointed First Secretary of the Moscow city Communist Party in order to dislodge Viktor Grishin. Grishin, in his 70’s and in poor health, had been a member of Brezhnev’s Politburo and had presented himself as Chernenko’s pick as his successor as General Secretary. He had been First Secretary of the Moscow party since 1967 and the city committee was viewed by the Politburo as being ineffective, in decline and tainted with charges of corruption. Yeltsin thought Gorbachev selected him because he was certain he (Yeltsin) could “clear away the old debris”, fight corruption and was “tough enough” to carry out a cleanup of the committee’s personnel.

Powerful men had held this position including Vyacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich, close associates of Stalin, and Nikita Khrushchev, General Secretary of the CPSU 1953 to 1964. Again Ryzhkov warned Gorbachev about promoting Yeltsin to the Moscow party chief. “He will chop wood and it will be your elbows that will smart.” Later Gorbachev would very much regret ignoring Ryzhkov’s advice. Yeltsin would use the Moscow party chief

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9 Colton, p. 109. Also see foot note 8, p. 493, Taubman, p. 222.
10 Colton, p. 112-113.
12 Colton, pp. 116-117. “He’ll cause problems and you’ll feel the pain”
position to challenge Gorbachev. As Moscow’s “mayor” Yeltsin’s reputation as a populist reformer helped him to be elected Russia’s first president in 1991.

Vladimir Putin was an officer in the KGB’s foreign intelligence service in East Germany when the fall of the Berlin Wall ended Soviet intelligence operations in that country. He returned to St. Petersburg in January 1990 where he had been born and raised. Putin was offered the position as assistant to the President of Leningrad State University responsible for international liaison. It was a KGB position used to keep an eye on students and international visitors. Putin graduated from Leningrad State University in 1974 with a law degree. He saw the assignment as an opportunity to begin studies for a doctoral degree in international private law and think about what he wanted to do next.

Putin soon came to the attention of Anatoly Sobchak, the chairman of the St. Petersburg city council who was to become his boss and introduce him to a career in politics. There are several versions how he came to hire Putin. In his autobiography, First Person, Putin stated an old friend from the law faculty at the university asked him to help Sobchak who needed someone “good on his team”. In his biography of Putin, Steven Myers wrote that Sobchak “needed allies and expertise” to help navigate the political upheaval of the times and turned to the KGB to look for a competent aide. Sobchak wanted someone with a “low profile” in the KGB and “found” Putin. Sobchak said in later interviews he ran into Putin in a university hallway and remembered him as one of his former students when he (Sobchak) taught in the law faculty in the 1970’s. After chatting briefly with Putin and learning about his service in Germany he decided to hire him.¹³

Regardless of how Putin came to the attention of Sobchak, he soon became a permanent employee of his staff. In 1991 Sobchak was elected mayor of St. Petersburg. Putin became Chairman for the Committee for Foreign Liaison in the Mayor’s office and a deputy mayor. At that time business in St. Petersburg was all about making deals, personal connections with the

city government, and finding and using leverage. Putin was a “wheeler and dealer, brokering foreign investments and refereeing business disputes through personal connections, contacts and threats. He became the ‘main enabler’ for the city’s economy, approving hundreds of licenses and ensuring the state shared in the wealth.” In an interview his personal secretary, Marina Yentaltseva, said “If he gave an assignment, he really didn’t care how it was done or who did it or what problems they had. It just had to get done and that was that.”

Putin was noted “… for his competence, effectiveness and absolute, ruthless loyalty to Sobchak”. Sobchak trusted him and gave him more duties running the city in part because Putin showed no interest in replacing his boss. In a 2000 newspaper interview Sobchak described Putin, “… He has this trait: he does not like to standout. In this sense he is a person devoid of vanity, of any external ambition, but inside he is a leader.” A few years later these personality traits would be much admired by Boris Yeltsin, Russia’s President.

In 1996 Sobchak lost his attempt to be re-elected mayor of St. Petersburg. Putin then resigned from the city government. Shortly after an initial offer to Putin of a position in the Kremlin quickly vanished, Aleksis Kudrin who had also been a deputy mayor in charge of finances and taxes in St. Petersburg was appointed chief of the Kremlin’s Main Control Directorate (U.S. equivalent of the Office of the Inspector General).

Also Aleksei Bolshakov who had been First Deputy of the executive committee of the St. Petersburg City Council during the Soviet era was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister. After Bolshakov was forced out of the city government by Alexander Sobchak, he became a businessman who Putin gave preferential treatment to. In an interview Putin stated, “From time to time Bolshakov would appear in Smolny (historic building housing the Mayor’s office) on business. I never made him wait in the reception area. I would always stop what I was doing, kick everybody out, come out into the reception area myself and say, “Aleksei Alekseyevich, right this way.” Kudrin asked Bolshakov to intervene for Putin with Pavel Borodin, Director of

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14 Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin (Washington DC, 2013) p. 16.  
15 Myers, pp. 79-84.  
16 Putin, p. 97.  
17 Myers, pp. 84. Gessen, pp. 96-97.
the Presidential Management Directorate.\(^\text{18}\) The Directorate oversaw all the Kremlin’s assets including buildings, apartments, palaces, spas, hotels, dachas, and art. Borodin was in the position to hand out favors and the Directorate became known as the “patronage mill”. In August 1996 Putin was appointed deputy in charge of the legal division and Russian property abroad.

Why was Putin brought to Moscow? In *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, the authors called Putin “Sochak’s fixer”. St. Petersburg business during the 90’s was about making deals, personal connections with the city government, and “finding and using leverage”. They wrote because of his experience in enforcing informal rules and making corrupt business men deliver to the city during the free-wheeling days in St. Petersburg he had become an “expert” in controlling businesses and protecting the interests of the state.\(^\text{19}\)

In March 1997 Kudrin was promoted to deputy Finance Minister and on his recommendation Putin replaced him as head of the Main Control Directorate. Putin proved himself to be discrete in his investigations and selective in the enforcement of his office’s duties when it came to charges of corruption by President Boris Yeltsin and his “Family”.\(^\text{20}\) Yeltsin noticed Putin’s work. He wrote in his memoirs “Putin’s reports were a model of clarity”. He did not try to push an agenda or engage him in conversation, and avoided “political games”. Yeltsin felt “… this young man was ready for absolutely anything in life, that he would respond to any challenge with clarity and precision”.\(^\text{21}\) In May 1998 Putin was again promoted to first deputy

\(^{18}\) Putin, pp. 126-128. Some sources report Borodin was familiar with Putin. Putin had assisted him when his daughter was sick in St. Petersburg and Borodin had contacted the Mayor’s office for help. Also Putin had assisted the Kremlin in seizing a government owned dacha in St. Petersburg that had been leased to a joint Russian-American security company.

\(^{19}\) Hill and Gaddy, p. 16, p. 144, p. 166.

\(^{20}\) Myers, 112-113. Some commentators described Yeltsin’s “Family” as being Russia’s real rulers. There were constant accusations of corruption. The “Family” consisted of his close relatives, some government officials and oligarchs, and other “hangers on”. Yeltsin’s daughter Tatyana, her first husband Leonid Dyachenko, and Valentin Yumashev, Yeltsin’s chief of staff and Tatyana second husband, were the hub of his “Family”. The oligarch Boris Berezovsky was closely associated with the “Family”. Berezovsky knew Putin from St. Petersburg where he worked with him to set up a car dealership. He was impressed when Putin didn’t ask for a bribe. In a 2008 interview in London Berezovsky claimed to have visited Putin regularly in St. Petersburg, to have visited Putin daily when he was FSB director and to have entertained Putin at his exclusive club in Moscow. See Gessen, pp. 16-20. Putin does not mention Berezovsky in *First Person*.

director of presidential administration in charge of relations with Russia’s regions and their governors.

In 1998 Boris Yeltsin was suspicious of the Federal Security Service (FSB) that replaced the KGB. He was concerned about the role it might be playing with his political rivals and potential investigations of corruption in his administration and the Family. He wrote in his memoirs the FSB was gathering compromising materials on commercial banks and businessmen, and had to be made less politicized. Yeltsin needed to bring the FSB under the control of the Kremlin. He addressed his concerns by appointing Putin Director of the FSB in July 1998. In a reorganization of the FSB, Putin eliminated two key Directorates – Directorate for Economic Counter Intelligence and Directorate for Counter Intelligence Protection of Strategic Sites – charged with investigating high level economic crimes.

Also Yeltsin feared corruption investigations by Prosecutor General Yuri Skuratov who he was convinced was scheming with his political rivals. On March 17, 1999, a grainy video of a naked man who resembled Skuratov in bed with two prostitutes was shown on a news program on a government TV channel. Putin stated the FSB did not film the video but vouched for its authenticity. When Skuratov resisted resigning, Putin provided evidence collected by the FSB that the Prosecutor General had attended parties with prostitutes paid for by known gangsters. Skuratov was forced to step aside during the investigation of this charge.

By this time Boris Yeltsin had been in and out of the hospital with severe cardiac problems, was depressed and drinking heavily. He was fearful of political rivals, parliament was clamoring to impeach him, the Russian economy had crashed and his popularity with the public was at an all-time low. He needed a strong prime minister who could protect him from his political enemies. That man was Vladimir Putin who was appointed Prime Minister in August 1999. Yeltsin’s reasons for appointing Putin were described in his memoirs. “There was something wrong with Russian generals. They were missing something important… a nobility, sophistication… inner resolve.” Putin was the military man he had been waiting for to appear.

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22 Yeltsin, p. 327.
Putin was an officer like “... the generals I (Yeltsin) read about when I was young.” Yeltsin sensed the public’s need for a steel backbone that would strengthen the whole government.24

There was a more compelling reason for Yeltsin’s appointment of Putin as Prime Minister other than he was Marshal Zhukov incarnate and didn’t appear to want his (Yeltsin’s) job. What impressed Yeltsin most about Putin was his loyalty. Corruption investigations against Anatoly Sobchak began during his 1996 re-election campaign and continued after his defeat. A special prosecution team from Moscow had been sent by the Prosecutor General’s office to investigate his administration as part of a highly publicized Yeltsin campaign against corruption. Also Sobchak had not endeared himself to Yeltsin when in a January 1997 interview he criticized Yeltsin’s administration as being a “virtual anarchy” and a “criminalization of authority”.25 In October 1997 Sobchak was arrested in St. Petersburg. Complaining of chest pains he was taken to a St. Petersburg hospital where he remained for a month. On November 07, Putin who was then head of the Main Control Directorate had Sobchak and his wife transferred from the hospital to a waiting plane at the St. Petersburg airport and flown to safety in Paris. Putin had not informed Yeltsin of his plan and took a tremendous risk solely out of loyalty to his former boss. Yeltsin wrote in his memoirs, “When I learned that Putin had helped send Sobchak abroad, I had mixed feelings. Putin had taken a great risk. Yet I profoundly admired his actions.” 26

On December 31, 1999 Yeltsin resigned as President of Russia and appointed Putin as acting President. In his address to the Russian people announcing his decision to resign, Yeltsin said, “Russia should enter the new millennium with new politicians, new faces, new people who are intelligent, strong and energetic...”27 As he left the Kremlin that day he told Putin, “Take care, take care of Russia.” Later on the 31st Putin signed a decree that granted Yeltsin immunity from any future prosecution and seizure of assets.

When Putin came to Moscow he brought with him “a tail” of aides and close friends from St. Petersburg who he had a personal relationship with and trusted, whose loyalty to him was unquestioned and who he believed could deliver results in the tasks he assigned them. His inner

24 Yeltsin, pp. 70, 213.
25 Myers pp. 116-117, see footnote 51, p. 502
27 Myers, p. 170.
circle came from the security services, they were his judo partners and businessmen who became wealthy during his tenure as deputy mayor in St. Petersburg. In an interview for his biography, “First Person”, Putin stated “I have a lot of friends but only a few people really close to me. They have never gone away. They have never betrayed me, and I haven’t betrayed them either. In my view that’s what counts the most.”

In a March 24, 2000 interview with Ted Koppel on Nightline, Putin responded to a question about why he was bringing so many security service veterans from St. Petersburg to Moscow, “I’ve brought them to the Kremlin in staff positions because I have known them for many years and I trust them… It has nothing to do with ideology, it has to do with their professional qualities and personal relationships.”

Anatoly Rakhlov, a former judo instructor from St. Petersburg, stated in a 2007 interview that Putin “doesn’t take the St. Petersburg boys to work with him because of their pretty eyes, but because he trusts people who are tried and true.”

As Putin rose in power in the government his inner circle accumulated enormous wealth. They were appointed heads of state corporations and profitable government agencies such as the Custom Service. They became wealthy owners of critical natural resource (oil, gas, minerals…), transportation and construction industries who received preferential treatment and protection from the government and lucrative no bid contracts. Wealth was viewed as the proper reward for performing well the tasks assigned to them by Putin and absolute loyalty to him.

How does Putin ensure continued loyalty? According to the authors of Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin, Putin has a deal with the oligarchs that they can continue to increase their wealth and avoid prison and/or exile if they don’t “meddle in the Kremlin’s business” and remain loyal to him. It they break the deal, they will be punished by the “full severity of the law” and sent to Russia’s savage prison system. The best known example is the imprisonment and then exile of the oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky once the richest man in Russia. Khodorkovsky was arrested in October 2003 on charges of fraud and tax evasion, and was given a 9-year sentence in a Siberian prison. He was released in 2013 and sent into exile in

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28 Hill and Gaddy, p. 159.
29 www.nytimes/2000/03/24/world/putin-will-use-ex-kgb-men
30 Quoted in Hill and Gaddy, p. 238.
31 Hill and Gaddy, p. 230, p.236. See Joshua Yaffa, “Putin’s Shadow Cabinet and the Bridge to the Crimea”, newyorker.com/2017/05/29/putins-shadow-cabinet...
Switzerland. Khodorkovsky’s mistake was to have become involved in politics and fund political parties that opposed Putin.

Also the authors wrote that much of the wealth of the inner circle is the result of illegal activity. “Everyone’s wealth has been deliberately tainted.” They have been compromised and are vulnerable to threats of prosecution. It is “… mutually ensured incrimination to ensure loyalty.”

In 2007 a commentator wrote on a Russian website, “Attempts to safeguard one’s children and oneself from possible persecution by former colleagues along the ‘power vertical’ (the government’s chain of authority), along with the desire to maximally enrich oneself while in power, had become practically the main purpose of all political and economic decisions.”

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the CPSU, the new Secretary General always came from the Politburo. The designation of a new General Secretary of the CPSU required a decision and the support of the Politburo and Central Committee. The backing of the powerful CPSU that reached into every level of Soviet society ensured stability for the new regime.

There are no centralized political institutions in Russia. Putin’s personal power and the loyalty of those who most benefit from his patronage is the “glue” that holds Russia together. Only he will decide when to retire and select someone else to become President of Russia. Perhaps Putin believes only he is strong enough to prevent the oligarchs, the inner circle and security services from turning on one another in a cynical fight for wealth and power that would threaten the country’s stability. A Russian opposition newspaper published caricatures of Putin as “the president for life” and his inner circle. Putin’s face was lined with wrinkles and his inner circle from St. Petersburg looked “… like the hunched veterans of the Great Patriotic War.”

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32 Quoted in Dawisha, p. 348.
33 See Myers, p. 522, footnote 14.
34 See Myers, p.p. 328-330. In 2007 conflict broke out between factions in the security services and their allies in the inner circle over the importation of Chinese furniture without the payment of appropriate taxes and duties.
36 See Myers, p. 391.
If Putin decides not to run for re-election in 2024, his successor most likely will be someone who followed him from St. Petersburg. If Putin is “president for life”, it will be someone new and younger who he has a close personal relationship with, has not schemed for his job (Putin’s), has a strong hand and can be trusted without hesitation. Whoever Putin chooses will struggle to “rule” the competing factions in the absence of any type of formal consensual process that would confer some sort of legitimacy to the selection of the new president. Putin has always been a strong proponent of strong state power to ensure stability and unity in Russia. Yet his decision to rule by “personal power” in the absence of any political institutions will ensure chaos when the time comes for a new president. His absence most likely will bring another “time of troubles” to Russia.