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1. **UK Ministry of Defence**

**YEL'TSIN: IN POWER BEYOND 2000?**

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**The Nature Of The Political System**

Russia is not a democracy. It is a hybrid political system, with elements of a democracy, along with elements of arbitrariness and dictatorial style of rule. The leadership is not fully accountable to the electorate, and there is no guarantee that a defeated president would be prepared to hand power over to a victorious candidate. The system has a super-powerful presidency, which many have argued has been detrimental to the development of democracy. Problems connected with the power of this office are exacerbated by the personality of the current office holder and his state of health. Yel'tsin himself is one of the biggest threats to Russian political stability.

**The Position Of Yel'tsin**

As is well-known, Yel'tsin is due to step down as President in July 2000, as he will have served two consecutive presidential terms. Under the 1993 constitution, a president is only permitted to serve two consecutive terms. Until autumn of last year, there was some speculation that Yel'tsin might run for re-election in 2000, as he was originally elected in 1991, that is before the current constitution came into force. In November 1998, the Constitutional Court ruled that Yel'tsin could not run again, and he said that he would abide by this decision. He repeated his intention to step down during the G8 summit in Cologne in June.

However, it should not be assumed that this is necessarily his last word on the subject. Yel'tsin may well be tempted to remain in power beyond June 2000. Were he to step down as president it is quite possible that he, members of his family and other close associates could be liable to prosecution for corruption. In the absence of any immunity guarantees, Yel'tsin might feel he has no alternative but to remain in power. Such a step would of course be illegal, and would carry an enormous risk that it would destabilise the entire political system. However, Yel'tsin is mercurial and highly unpredictable, and has shown in the past that he is willing to gamble and take enormous risks. Such a move cannot be ruled out, if he feels his position to be desperate. In the spring one of his doctors stated that his health was good and he was fit enough to run again for president.<sup>1</sup><sup>[1]</sup> This might be a hint that Yel'tsin is thinking in terms of remaining in power beyond June 2000.

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## **How Might He Attempt To Remain In Power?**

The most likely move would be to declare a state of emergency, and state that it is too dangerous to hold elections. He may, for example, argue that there is danger of a Communist takeover and establish direct presidential rule. Such moves would be illegal, but he may argue that such a situation requires extreme measures. In July 1999 the Justice Ministry has warned that there are grounds for banning the Communist Party, as it is allegedly violating the constitution by having party cells in workplaces. This may be preparing the ground for the implementation of a ban and the subsequent declaration of a state of emergency. It hardly needs stating that such a move would be extremely destabilising, as it would be opposed by all opposition movements, and could lead to force being used. It is unlikely that the internal security forces or the army would all line up alongside Yel'tsin, and there would also be resistance from some regional leaders.

## **The Dismissal Of Yevgenny Primakov**

Yevgenny Primakov was dismissed as prime minister by Yel'tsin in May. He was appointed and confirmed as prime minister only in September 1998. It is worth noting that since January 1998, Russia has had five prime ministers, either acting or fully confirmed in the post. The turnover of personnel in this position gives some indication of the tremendous lack of stability in Russian politics, and also of Yel'tsin's capriciousness. It seems that Primakov was dismissed primarily because of Yel'tsin's jealousy of his popularity. Opinion polls asking for voters' preferences for the next president tended to place Primakov at the top of the poll. The decision was hardly calculated to inspire confidence in the stability of the system. Since his appointment, Primakov had done much to create a certain degree of stability, as he was widely respected by all major political forces in the country. Whilst the economic situation did not improve under his premiership, neither did it deteriorate. Primakov also worked hard to improve cooperation with the Duma, while Yel'tsin had tended to ignore the legislature.

If Yel'tsin is tempted to remain in power beyond June 2000, Primakov would probably prove to be a significant opponent. He would be unlikely to support such a blatant violation of the constitution, and it would therefore have been politically very damaging for Yel'tsin to have him as prime minister if he attempts to remain in power by violating the constitution. Primakov would probably have resigned in such an eventuality, which would have undermined Yel'tsin's already shaky moral authority. Dismissing Primakov from the premiership and replacing him with Sergey Stepashin removed this possible danger for Yel'tsin. Stepashin lacks any power base, and so he owes his position entirely to Yel'tsin's patronage, and would be less likely to object to any anti-constitutional activity by the president. Having a much lower profile than Primakov, Stepashin is less likely to enjoy the high degree of popularity that Primakov did, and so is less likely to be perceived as a threat to Yel'tsin. Primakov also attempted to pursue corruption allegations against close associates of Yel'tsin, such as Boris Berezovskiy, and Stepashin is much less likely to favour pursuing such investigations. Of course, if Yel'tsin believes that sacrificing Stepashin will boost himself politically, then he will do this. It is possible that Stepashin may be dismissed after the Duma elections in December if the result is a victory for anti-Yel'tsin forces.

## **The Duma Elections**

Duma elections are scheduled to take place in December. The Duma has little power under the constitution, and the elections will simply serve to give some indication of the national mood six months before the presidential elections are scheduled to take place. Current opinion polls indicate that the Communist Party, Yury Luzhkov's Fatherland movement and Yabloko are likely to do well. If the Duma results are a complete humiliation for Yel'tsin, then this may prompt him to consider extra-constitutional moves.

## **The Presidential Election**

If Yel'tsin does step down, and presidential elections take place, it is currently difficult to see who would represent the Yel'tsinite establishment. There have been plenty of individuals in the past whom Yel'tsin has allowed to think are his likely successors, but who have then been unceremoniously dumped. In June, the head of the presidential administration Aleksandr Voloshin said that Yel'tsin would not necessarily name his preferred candidate, although he said that Stepashin might possibly become the next president.

Whom the financial oligarchs support will be of great importance in view of their ability to bankroll an election campaign and their control of the media, particularly the electronic media.

If presidential elections do take place next June-July, then the most likely major candidates are:

Yevgenny Primakov (if he stands)

Yury Luzhkov, current mayor of Moscow and leader of Fatherland

Aleksandr Lebed, governor of Krasnoyarsk and leader of the Popular

Republican Party

Grigory Yavlinskiy, leader of Yabloko

Gennady Zyuganov, or whoever leads the communists.

The Russian presidential voting system is similar to the French, in that if no one gets more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round, then the top two go to a second round. The communist candidate is likely to get through to the second round, but to lose to whomever he faces, as the Russian electorate appears happy to put communists in the Duma, but not in a position where they can exercise real power (ie the presidency) for fear they might try to put the clock back.

From opinion polls, it seems likely that the next president of Russia will be either Yevgenny Primakov or Yury Luzhkov. Judging from current attitudes, Yel'tsin is hostile to both of them. Either a Primakov or a Luzhkov presidency would probably attempt to pursue market reforms, probably with a more statist approach. In foreign policy terms, both are likely to be more nationalistic vis-à-vis the West than Yel'tsin has been since 1991. However, neither is likely to make much of an impact in limiting the power of the financial oligarchs, even if they are inclined to do so.

Luzhkov's ruling style may well be quite authoritarian, to judge by his performance as mayor of Moscow, whereas Primakov may favour limiting the power of the presidency, and trying to build a broader consensus with the both the Duma and regional leaders.

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