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Duma Elections and Future Russian Policies

By

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The elections of December 16, 2003 to the 4th State Duma of the Russian Federation were a major step in the transformation of the Russian political system into a “controlled democracy” as painstakingly planned by the Kremlin. Only four party factions could overcome the 5% barrier and make it into the lower chamber of the Russian legislature: “United Russia” [*“Edinaya Rossiya”*] -- 37.57% of the total cast ballots; the Communist Party of the Russian Federation-- 12.61%; the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia – 11.45%; and “Motherland” [*“Rodina”*] – 9.02%.¹

The main theme of the elections seemed to be the resounding defeat of the “rightist” parties – the “*Yabloko*” block of Georgii Yavlinskii and Vladimir Lukin, and the “Union of Rightist Forces” [*“Soytuz pravvykh sil”* - SPS] headed by Irina Khakamada, Boris Nemtsov and Anatolii Chubais. Many also saw it as the defeat of Western-type liberalism in Russia: “*Yabloko*” and SPS consistently recommended and pursued policies based on ideas of Western-type democracy and liberal market economy, and promoted orientation of Russian foreign policy towards closer rapprochement and cooperation with the West.

Another noteworthy result of the elections was the success of the “Motherland” faction created shortly before the Duma elections literally “from scratch”. “Motherland’s” three main leaders: Dmitrii Rogozin, head of the Third Duma International Affairs Committee, Victor Gerashenko, former head of the Central Bank, and Segeri Glaziev, who defected from the Communist faction of Gennadii Zuzanov, had previously little in common ideologically and politically. “Motherland’s” trump card at the elections was protection of the rights of Russian nationals anywhere, particularly in the former Soviet republics. It is widely suspected that the creation of the new party was masterminded in the Kremlin with the goal of further eroding the pro-Communist electorate. If so, this plan succeeded perfectly. According to Dmitrii Rogozin, the leading ideologue of the new party, it is intended to eventually evolve into a “Labor party with nationalist undertones”.²

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation was also a major loser in the elections. In effect, this loss by the Communists is perceived by many as a prelude to the total marginalization of Communism in contemporary Russian politics.

The structure of the Duma has been fundamentally changed to reflect the new balance of political forces in the country and the dominance of the “party of power” – the “United Russia” block. Firstly, only four factions were allowed to continue in existence within the Duma.³

Secondly, “United Russia” could gather a faction that exceeds 300 members thereby achieving a so-called “constitutional majority”, i.e. the ability to adopt amendments to the

¹ “Elections: Central Election Committee May Cancel Results of Duma Elections,” *Lenta.ru*, 26 December 2003, <<http://www.lenta.ru/vybory/2003/12/26/cancel/>>

² Svetlana Ofitova, “I Do Not Intend to Discuss the Work of the Kremlin since My president Is My Employer,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16 December 2003.

³ “Elections: State Duma Structure to Change: There Would Be No Alliances Outside Four Factions”, *Lenta.ru*, 18 December 2003. <<http://lenta.ru/vybory/2003/12/26/duma/>>

Russian constitution at the Duma floor.⁴ The size of the faction by far exceeds the proportionate vote received by “United Russia” at the polls. This was achieved primarily by attracting the so-called “independent deputies” [originally 23] who were not allowed to form their own “independent” factions outside the four main party groupings.

The Communists could get only a 52-member faction, while Liberal-Democrats and “Motherland” each have 36 member-factions.⁵

Thirdly, “United Russia” representatives captured all key positions in the Duma, from the post of the Speaker all the way down to committee chairmanships.⁶ Boris Gryzlov, head of “United Russia” and former Interior Minister [he quit his ministerial position to concentrate of Duma activity shortly after the elections] was elected the Speaker of the State Duma at its first meeting on December 29 by 352 votes. Two First Deputy Speakers elected together with Gryzlov – Lyubov Slyska and Aleksander Zhukov—also represent “United Russia”. Deputy Speakers include 5 more representatives of “United Russia” – Vladimir Potekhin, Oleg Morosov, Vyacheslav Volodin, Artur Chilingarov, Georgii Boos, and one representative each from the three other Duma factions – Dmitrii Rogozin from “Motherland”; Vladimir Zhyrinovskii from the Liberal Democrats, and Valentin Kuptsov from the Communists.⁷

Official Moscow maintains, in the words of Vladimir Putin, that the results of the elections “reflect the real sympathies of the population, realistically reflect what the people of Russia thinks, and reflect the realities of our political life”.⁸ This assessment may be close to reality: under the impact of economic problems of the 1990s, the Russian populations has become seriously disillusioned with liberal “experiments” at transforming the country that led to tremendous social polarization with the majority of Russians living beyond or at the poverty level. Official propaganda had little problem convincing the electorate that the “rightists” largely associated with the hated “oligarchs” [heads of major private corporations] were to blame for most internal problems. The well-timed arrest and imprisonment of several oligarchs, e.g. Mikhail Khodorkovskii shortly before the December Duma elections sealed the fate of the liberals.

The majority expert opinion in Russia is that “the election results practically make Putin the absolute ruler of Russia. Economic reforms, the transformation of the state, and Russian foreign policy will all be dependent upon him to a greater extent than ever before. The elections showed a significant demand for nationalist sentiment, which affects foreign policy. And it will fall on Putin to decide how to deal with its traditional partners - in the West as well as in the post-Soviet sphere.”⁹

⁴ One such amendment may be changing the rule on two consecutive terms in office for the incumbent president that would hypothetically allow Vladimir Putin to continue in his current job after 2008.

⁵ Igor Kozhev, “Duma: New Speaker for the New Year,” *Vesti.ru*, 29 December 2003.

⁶ By many indications, “United Russia” representatives are expected to occupy chairperson positions in all or most of the 28 Duma Committees. This matter is to be decided by late January 2004.

⁷ Igor Kozhev, “Duma: New Speaker for the New Year,” *Vesti.ru*, 29 December 29 2003.

⁸ Vladimir Putin. “Introductory statement at the meeting with members of the government”, 8 December 2003, <<http://kremlin.ru/text/appears/2003/12/56843.shtml>>

⁹ An interview with Russian scholar Dmitrii Trenin <[http://www.washprofile.org/english/2%20\(Dec.15\)/trenin.asp](http://www.washprofile.org/english/2%20(Dec.15)/trenin.asp)>

Internal “consolidation” that includes the establishment of the near-perfect “vertical lines of control” within the system and elimination of any credible opposition to the central regime in Moscow, opens up several paths for Putin. In the near term, he will most likely continue the course of moderate albeit rigorously-controlled reforms inside the country and the policy of interaction and cooperation with the West to the extent it benefits Russian interests, e.g. in combating terrorism and attracting outside resources for revitalization of the Russian economy.

In the long term, the Putin regime will be increasingly tempted to begin reestablishing Russia as a world economic and military power. An important question is: to what extent will Vladimir Putin and people around him be able to control the rising tide of nationalism? Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia remains without a strong official ideology. The “Rodina” block has demonstrated advantages of espousing nationalism – in its mild, patriotic, form. The Kremlin-oriented “United Russia” cannot forever depend on a single highly charismatic and popular politician to sustain its influence. In the future, a “marriage of convenience” between “United Russia” and “Rodina” on the foundation of common pro-nationalist ideology should not be excluded. However, in this case both will unavoidably face problems of competition for leadership and dangers of sliding towards more virulent and extreme forms of nationalism, e.g. chauvinism, racialism, fascism, etc.

Of significant importance are Western and particularly U.S. attitudes and policies. Some experts hint at “a possibility that the U.S. would overreact to the developments inside Russia, and to the more active Russian policies around the borders of the Russian Federation. The Russian leadership, meanwhile, can take unilateral steps in these regions without having to secure the approval of Europe or the U.S. – which could lead to confrontation in places like Georgia”¹⁰. Such developments may also contribute to further expansion of nationalism and spread of anti-Americanism in Russian society.

Already today the balance between factors that attract Moscow to the West, e.g. setting barriers to extremist Islam, and those that give rise to growing aloofness is at best tenuous. A serious matter of Russian concern remains NATO’s eastward expansion. As described by Aleksei Lyashenko of the *Krasnaya Zvezda*, “The very factor of NATO’s expansion over the post-Soviet space fails to find acceptance with the Russian people. Under current circumstances this fact does not apparently create a direct threat to Russian national security. However, these “circumstances” have one peculiarity – they change constantly. Moscow fears potential significant build up of U.S. and NATO forces in the Baltic and other adjacent states.”¹¹

In view of the perceived attempts by the U.S. to infringe on Russian interests, some Russian experts suggest Moscow should not shun from taking advantage of difficulties and problems arising for the U.S. For example, writing in the prestigious *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhisn* journal of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Vladislav Inozemtsev, Scientific Manager of the Center for Post-Industrial Society Research and Editor-in-Chief of the *Svobodnaya Mysl - XXI* journal, proposes taking advantage of the economic problems facing America today “that are deeper than they have ever been since the end of

¹⁰ An interview with Russian scholar Dmitrii Trenin
<[http://www.washprofile.org/english/2%20\(Dec.15\)/trenin.asp](http://www.washprofile.org/english/2%20(Dec.15)/trenin.asp)>

¹¹ Aleksei Lyashenko, “The Year Is Over – the Problems Remain,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 30 December 2003.

World War Two”, and of the fact that “the United States, and this is being confirmed by the situation in Iraq, is very restricted in the use of its military might”.¹² In Inozemtsev’s view, “there are no grounds today for relating to the U.S. as a “senior” partner in negotiations. Russia has an interest in close friendly relations with this great power, but its interest is no stronger than that which the United States itself has in working together with the Russian Federation.”¹³

Expanding advanced U.S. military programs and activities in regions adjacent to Russian borders provide rationale and impetus for modernization of the Russian armed forces and developing responsive Russian programs. The Russian president and other top leaders emphasize that “the main task of the military is modernization of the armed forces”.

Considerable efforts continue to go into revitalizing the Military-Industrial Complex. In 2003 MIC registered modest gains. In the first ten months of 2003 the volume of production and services rose 9.5%. However most of the advanced weapon systems produced by MIC were exported. As reported by the main Russian arms exporting company “Rosoboronexport”, export earnings in 2003 reached \$5 billion. The State Defense Order increased by 33.4% and reached 109.8 billion Rubles [approximately \$3.6 billion] with 45% of this amount dedicated to military R&D.¹⁴ These parameters are considered unsatisfactory for a sustained modernization effort. There is growing demand for substantial increases of state appropriations for defense to make goals of modernizing the Russian armed forces a reality. Under Kremlin’s control, the new Duma will certainly respond to any government request for increased military appropriations.

Another major tool of modernization is “military and military-technical cooperation within the framework of CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States]”. As stated by Vladimir Putin at the meeting of the Council of Defense Ministers of CIS held in Moscow on 10 December 2003, the goal for 2004 is to develop “conceptual approaches to military cooperation [among CIS countries] until 2010”.¹⁵

In a series of recent statements, Moscow confirmed that reliance on strategic nuclear weapons will grow and efforts will be undertaken to modernize the existing aging arsenals in response to U.S. strategies and activities in the nuclear area. In late November 2003, First Deputy Commander of the General Staff Yurii Baluevskii confirmed that Russia would “introduce corrections into plans devoted to the development of its strategic nuclear forces... in the face of the new U.S. nuclear doctrine that talks about the use of low-yield nuclear munitions... Today, the nuclear weapons that used to be regarded as an instrument of political deterrence become theater weapons,” stressed Baluevskii.¹⁶

¹² Vladislav Inozemtsev “Russian-US Relations: Where Next?”, *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 10 October 2003. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20031231000108]

¹³ Vladislav Inozemtsev “Russian-US Relations: Where Next?”, *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 10 October 2003. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20031231000108]

¹⁴ Victor Myasnikov, “MIC – A Year without Reforms”, *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 26 December 2003.

¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Presentation for the Participants in the Meeting of the Council of Defense Ministers of States-Members of CIS,” 10 December 2003, <<http://kremlin.ru/text/appears/2003/12/56992.shtml>>

¹⁶ “Russia Corrects Development of Strategic Nuclear Forces to Reflect U.S. Plans on Using Nuclear Weapons,” *Interfax*, 26 November 2003.

A major goal set for the strategic triad is its ability to deal effectively with the emerging U.S. BMD systems.¹⁷ Significant emphasis is being laid on the newest ICBM in the Russian inventory -- the "Topol-M". Shortly before the New Year, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov spoke about efforts to modernize the "Topol-M" complex. In 2004 flight testing of the mobile-based "Topol-M" will be completed, and missiles of this new modification will begin to be placed on combat duty. According to the *Interfax* news agency, "each launching unit will have its own anti-ABM system". As noted by an unnamed source in the General Staff, "if currently "Topol-M" has a 60-65% chance of penetrating the U.S. ABM systems, in the future it will be raised to 87%".¹⁸

The Russians indicate that they may be prepared to deal with potential hostile threats from superior forces, e.g. in Europe, by resorting to preemption and/or use of tactical nuclear weapons not subject to strategic force limitations. Experts count them among "subtle political tools" available to Russia in its geopolitical "games" and assert that Russia is determined to preserve and modernize its tactical nuclear arsenals to meet all potential hostile threats.¹⁹

Other triad components besides the Strategic Missile Forces are not left without attention. Currently there is a growing push to develop the long-range aviation as an important part of the triad.²⁰ In an interview granted to *Itar-Tass* news agency Colonel-General Vladimir Mikhailov, Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force reported on success in modernizing his service overall in 2003 and on future modernization plans: "In 2003, the Air Force received approximately 20 new aircraft, including Su-27 and Su-35 warplanes and Mi-8 helicopters and this process will continue in the New Year 2004. Work to modernize equipment and arms with which our troops are equipped will also be continued. Eighty per cent of the Air Force's current aircraft and equipment will have been modernized by 2005," the AF Commander-in-Chief noted.²¹

Special emphasis in dealing with the perceived threats from the West is also being made on the Russian "military space" assets. As reported by *Itar-Tass*, sources in the Command of the Space Troops claimed that the Space Troops "will have to make a substantive contribution to enhancing Russia's defense capability in 2004", in particular by "replenishment of the orbital grouping of military spacecraft and the input to the launches of new spacecraft in accordance with the federal space program". The main efforts of the service will focus on the extension of the technical resource of the available systems, as well as the preparation of a number of new systems and complexes for commissioning. Thus the flight tests of the "Rokot" space missile system will continue at Plesetsk cosmodrome and the testing of the Soyuz-2 carrier rocket will begin there. In addition, work will intensify at the northern space center to prepare for the testing of the

¹⁷ See: "Interview with General-Colonel Nikolai Solovtsev, Commander of the Strategic Missile Troops," Radio of Russia, "Slavyanka" Program, 6 January 2004. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040106000060].

¹⁸ "Ivanov Promised to Improve the "Topol-M" Missile Complex," *Lenta.ru*, 22 December 2003, <<http://lenta.ru/russia/2003/12/22/topol>>

¹⁹ Aleksei Arbatov, "A Subtle Political Tool," *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 5 December 2003.

²⁰ Igor Khvorov, Valentin Rog, "Heirs of the "Russian Vityaz"" at a Crossroad Again", *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, 19 December 2003.

²¹ "Russian Air Force Modernization Proceeds Apace", *Itar-Tass*, 6 January 04, [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040106000054]

space missile complex “*Angara*” that is due to begin in the early 2005. Multi-purpose space programs will be implemented at Russia’s leading launch site at Baikonur in 2004. These programs include launches of military and dual- purpose spacecraft. Work to develop the light “*Strela*” (Arrow) space missile system is expected to run to completion at the Svobodny cosmodrome in the Russian Far East. Its first flight tests are due to take place there too, according to *Itar-Tass* sources.²²

Modernization efforts are also geared to wider use of modern command and control means. In particular, the military wants to take wide use of the Global navigation satellite system GLONASS. In summer 2003, Commander of the General Staff Anatolii Kvashnin signed an order in accordance with which all units to the platoon level are to be equipped with GLONASS navigational receivers by late 2005. However, to implement this program Russia needs to significantly augment the GLONASS satellite system and organize large-scale production of receivers for the troops. The first GLONASS satellite was launched in October 1982 and in 1993 the incomplete system was officially commissioned. However, economic difficulties of the 1990s prevented to reach the goal of 24 navigation satellites in orbit. The most recent launch of three GLONASS satellites happened in December 2003. However the system remains short of even the minimal requirements to perform its global function (18 satellites).

As explained by Andrei Garavskii of *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Russia intends to find resources for making GLONASS fully operational by offering global positioning services to commercial non-military users inside and outside the country. Potentially, GLONASS may become, along with export of weapons, an additional important source of financing for the modernization drive in the Russian armed forces.²³

²² Vladislav Kuznetsov, “Russian Space Forces To Upgrade Defense Capability in 2004”, *Itar-Tass*, 5 January 2004. [FBIS Transcribed Text, CEP20040105000108]

²³ Andrei Garavskii, “GLONASS Is Our Hope,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 30 December 2003.