

Putin\222s Own Problems  
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Last week, we discussed how Putin has manipulated President Trump to carry out Putin\222s policy objectives. At some point, Trump\222s financial records will be revealed, and we will probably learn what Trump is so panicked about revealing: the extent of his indebtedness to Russia. Putin has something, some incriminating data he is using to pull Trump\222s strings. Money laundering may be one obvious issue.

But lest we despair that Putin\222s gleeful smile when he and the pathetic Trump are together, Putin\222s future does not look good either. We need a hard look at Russia to assess problems that face Putin---problems he may not be able to suppress.

For one thing, Russia\222s birthrate is terrible. They lost half their population since 1940, and the fertility rate is not climbing. Women living in dictatorships tend not to opt for many children. During the Communist period, abortion was the only way to end a pregnancy; contraception was not available. Their population will not increase through immigration either. Russia detests refugees.

Russia spans eleven time zones across Asia, culminating in two largest cities in the Pacific region: Khabarovsk and Vladivostok. Right now, there are continuing and serious public demonstrations against Putin and the Kremlin, demonstrations far less successful in Moscow or Petersburg. The people of Khabarovsk are furious that heavy handed Putin has grabbed the first good governor they elected and hauled him back to Moscow on a dubious murder charge, replacing him with an appointed governor who does not even live in the region.

Banners demanding Putin\222s resignation are everywhere. The protests have been swelling. The question is: does Putin have enough manpower to send almost 4,000 miles away, to put down the demonstrations? The local police are not intervening in the demonstrations, an unusual blessing in a land with an authoritarian history.

Russia\222s geography is both a curse (wide open to invasions) and a protection: so big that by the time invaders reach Moscow, their supply lines are vulnerable. Both Napoleon and Hitler learned this to their shame. Autocracy seems to be the only governing tool for a country this vast and diverse. The country\222s vulnerability is behind its paranoia, which haunts Putin\222s dreams.

Russia\222s economy is terrible. Almost half the country\222s wealth is in the hands of Putin and his circle of robber barons, but the rest lies in the amazing natural resources in Siberia: coal, oil, gas, gold, diamonds, and rare metals. Those resources in Western Siberia can be defended. It is questionable that Russia, with its declining population, will be able to dominate Eastern Siberia, which is much more likely to trade with China and the Pacific Rim than Moscow. Also, Siberia has water resources that China will try to take.

Putin, as all the other autocrats (including wanabe autocrat Trump) wasted time denying the Coronavirus, which has been duly noted by the population, dying in unnecessarily numbers because of this. Along with the Virus, the economy has also tanked, while other countries in Europe have access to money and are recovering. Long-suffering Russia will have to depend on their own means for recovery. Nobody will help them.

Putin\222s foreign policy is to inflict as much damage upon democratic institutions as he can. He does not offer an appealing alternative, as Communism tried to do; he wants revenge on the US and Western Europe, whose institutions he attacks with propaganda and internet conspiracy theories to sow distrust. This is a continuation of Russia\222s foreign policy since the late 19th century, a policy that wrecks but cannot build.

Finally, despite the circle of protection that he personally enjoys, protection from assassination and from the Coronavirus itself, not many autocrats die in bed of old age. He may well manage to extend his term in office (without election) to 2036, but he is mortal. He has enemies (the Chechens, just one group), one of whom may emulate the old Persian Assassin Cult that could kill anyone anywhere in the known world of their time.

Only Trump seems to love him, and that has an expiration date: election day.

685 words

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