

# Putin's Disappearing Act

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Constantly distracted by war threats and economic sabotage by the West, and pushing for fast development to upgrade living standards for many who desperately need it, Putin has apparently forgotten about the terminal toxicity of capitalism

and its myriad ecological problems. And, like all rulers of a key superpower, he has to worry about possible lethal enemies in his inner circle and beyond.

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**P**resident Putin has gone into hiding. Well, sort of. On September 14, [he said](#) that many people (“dozens”) in his inner circle have tested positive for the virus, and as a result he has to self-isolate. His sudden seclusion has sent waves of anguish across this huge country. His explanation was met with disbelief. Everybody around Putin is vaccinated and so is Putin, or so he claimed. Why would he need to self-isolate; how could all these vaccinated people become sick? Is the vaccine – fake? Or should we look for another explanation? Did he fall, or was he pushed? Will he come back? Is this the end of Putin’s era? Is Putin ill, or was he forced into isolation? Is it a conspiracy? The Russian government is, and always was manual, not automatic; the absence of the ruler at the helm of the mighty ship of the Russian state could spell trouble. The Russians do not believe the official version, but what is the truth?

A week before his announcement, on September 8th, a close friend of Putin and his former bodyguard, the man considered as a probable successor, the Minister for Emergencies, Mr Yevgeny [Zinichev, died](#) in unusual circumstances during an Arctic drill. The head of RT Margarita Simonyan said he died while trying to save a cameraman who fell off a cliff. Perhaps he was targeted as Putin’s successor, said rumours. Just before that, on September 7th, Putin went to a [Siberian retreat](#) with his Defence Minister, Mr Shoygu. What did they discuss far away from eavesdroppers? There were rumours that Putin suspected or uncovered a plot against him and preferred to minimise his contacts with the outside world and even with his own bodyguards. A very cautious man, President Putin knows that there are many powerful people and organisations that would like to see him dead and he doesn’t want to give them this satisfaction. For this reason, his enemies call him ‘The Old Man in the Bunker’. Still, Putin appeared on TV from his hideaway.

Alternately, there are precedents of rulers claiming force majeure when they wanted to miss an event or to avoid a meeting.

President Gorbachev learned of a plot hatched by Soviet hardliners and decided to stay away hoping to enjoy the benefits should the plot succeed and have his alibi if the plot fails. He went to his Crimean Phoros Palace during a tumultuous August 1991 and claimed he was detained by plotters; the plot failed, he returned to the capital, but he never got his powers back.

Likewise, the last Russian Emperor, Tsar Nicolas II learned of the planned demo of peasants and workers who intended to come to the Winter Palace to plead with the Tsar. He decided to stay away from possible trouble and went to his country residence Tsarskoe Selo. His officials machine-gunned the pleaders on the Bloody Sunday. This massacre caused the first Russian revolution of 1905-07, and the Tsar's absence didn't help him at all. On a different scale, President Trump went to play golf while his supporters gathered at the White House. It didn't help him: he had lost the White House and he was accused of illegal actions. In short, staying away is not a good option for the ruler, but it is done, sometimes.

Let us consider this possibility. What could move Putin to do a Phoros-2? Now is a very eventful time and a healthy Putin would have to visit Dushanbe and deal with Russian parliamentary elections, among other things.

### **Dushanbe Summit**

On September 16 and 17, there was the double summit of the [SCO](#) and the [CSTO](#) in Dushanbe. The SCO and the CSTO are two different international organisations, though their membership partly coincides. Putin was expected to come in person and deal with post-Afghanistan arrangements; though it could be dealt with remotely. But he was also supposed to meet with the leaders of China, India and Iran. Especially important was the planned summit with Chairman Xi, as the two leaders haven't met face to face for a long time. There were rumours in Moscow that Putin is avoiding meeting the Chinese leader, though it was pre-

planned for immediately after Geneva summit with Joe Biden. The Putin – Xi summit had been planned even earlier, to coincide with 20th anniversary of [Russo-Chinese Friendship Treaty](#); then it was postponed because of the Geneva summit, and then just cancelled. Xi was supposed to come to Dushanbe to the SCO summit. When he learned that Putin wouldn't come, he stayed at home, too. Thus this very important summit of two leaders didn't materialise. Could it be that Putin does not want to be seen siding with China, in the context of the fateful triangle Washington-Moscow-Beijing? Perhaps. The Russian elites are divided; some prefer close relations with China, and others want to throw Russia's lot in with the West. Putin is balancing these groups. Who will be first to make a deal with Biden, Putin or Xi? Perhaps Putin prefers to sit it out and allow Xi to try his hand first, at the next summit of the G2.

The physical place of Putin at Dushanbe had been taken by Alexander Lukashenko, the stalwart President of Belarus, and he visibly enjoyed the task. Years ago, after Belarus and Russia entered the Union State agreement, people mused that Lukashenko would lead both states, or at least deal with Russian domestic affairs, too. There was a feeling that Lukashenko would be better for economics, for agriculture, industry and social structure than Putin, who was more involved with foreign affairs. If Russia and Belarus would vote for the president, Belarusians would vote for Putin, while Russians would vote for Lukashenko, it was said jokingly. However, it didn't happen. Lukashenko managed the Dushanbe session just fine and Putin spoke to them via video link.

It seems they failed to bring some sense into the stubborn head of Mr Rahmon, though they tried. Russia is ready to defend Tajikistan in case of a Taliban offensive or infiltration. But the Tajik President has much more daring plans. He speaks against Taliban interference in Tajikistan, but has hopes to resurrect the Northern Alliance, the group of Northern warlords, the enemies of Taliban. They are predominantly members of ethnic minority groups; many of them Tajiks, the second biggest (after Pashtun) ethnic group of Afghanistan. It seems Rahmon would like to break Afghanistan up and create there the

second Tajik state and it would mean a new bout of civil war, something nobody else wants.

There was a report that Rahmon received and entertained Ahmad Massoud, the 'Panjshir rebel', and the former vice-president of Afghanistan Amrullah Saleh (who declared himself "acting president of Afghanistan", after the flight of Ghani). It is not clear whether such a meeting actually took place. It may be just one of many examples of fake news from Afghanistan produced by [Indian fake news factories](#). If it were true it would cross the red line in relations between the two neighbouring countries.

Russia would not like it, either: Russia has established working relations with the Taliban; the talibs asked Russia to help them to regain their lawful seat in the UN; they suggested a state visit to Moscow. The "Panjshir resistance" has been defeated without a battle. Some of the 'resisters' roam the mountains and appeal to warlike US politicians for support, but otherwise they lost their war. Apparently, [Massoud and Saleh found a refuge in Tajikistan](#); it would be fine for a humanitarian gesture, unless the ambitious Rahmon turns his country into a base in the Afghan civil war.

However, this development wouldn't justify Putin's sheltering, unless there are some security issues.

### **The Russian Parliamentary Elections**

Russia will "catch up with, and overtake America", [said Nikita Khrushchev](#) in 1957. The recent (17-19 September, 2021) Parliamentary elections could be seen as a new attempt to catch up with America's election fraud. The Russians couldn't overtake the Shining City on the Hill: the last US Presidential elections were so profoundly dishonest that nobody could beat them. But the Russians had a good try.

Russia has a mixed system of electing Parliamentary members: some are elected by a Party list and some by majoritarian system. In the places where people were allowed to vote freely and their voices were decently counted, – mainly in Siberia – the Communists won. Elsewhere, the ruling party United Russia got the seats. They utilised all the

methods successfully applied by the US Dems. People were allowed to vote at home and the collecting teams harvested a lot of votes. More people voted than there were registered. The opposition was kept away from the count. The seals of the voting boxes were often broken. But the best method was digital voting, allowed in a few cities including Moscow.

Like the postal vote in Detroit, the digital vote in Moscow was totally at variance with the real paper vote. Here is the picture of the Moscow vote, on the left – the real vote only, on the right – the real and digital vote; green for opposition (predominantly Communist), blue for the government candidates. The digital vote in Moscow had an unusual feature: voters were allowed to change their mind and re-vote. So the government could see the results and “re-vote” as much as they wanted.

Russia’s ‘democracy’ is as limited as anywhere. The political process is controlled by a governing body called AP (Administration of the President); it is not even mentioned in the constitution, but they decide who can take part in the elections and who will make it to the parliament. They do dirty tricks, too, by creating splinter parties to steal votes from the opposition. The AP decided that the Communists should not get more than 20 per cent of the vote, while the ruling United Russia should have about 50 per cent. These were the instructions given to local bosses and they just followed orders. In a few districts where the local bosses decided to ignore the AP orders, the Communists got up to 30 per cent, and United Russia below 30%. Together with the Socialists, the Russian Reds could form the new government. They would gladly serve under Putin.

The Russian Reds are not similar to the US (and European) Left. They are against identity politics, against gender and race discourse, they love Christ and Stalin. The Russian Reds differ from the US (and European) Right, for they support massive nationalization, a comprehensive health service and free education; they are against oligarchs and do not like immigration. In short, they are much more Putin than Putin. And they are not West-friendly. Their rise would

change things on the world scale. Now, for the first time since 1996, they became popular among young people as well as among the older citizens. Though they are very different from the pro-Western liberal opposition, they learned to do things together against the AP diktat. CPRF is basically a social-democratic party, perfectly fit to rule; but the AP considers them too independent.

The Communists rejected the results of the digital vote; the government responded in force. Many Communist candidates and their staff were arrested. The government forbade the protest demos and rallies, using the Coronavirus as their preferred pretext. What would they do without the Corona, I wonder! The West correctly accused the Russian authorities of manipulating the electoral results; wrongly they attributed the opposition success to Navalny and his pro-Western liberals. But the Reds are quite timid, for two reasons: they are rather supportive of Putin and his foreign policy, and they are afraid of being outlawed and banned, as happened under Yeltsin. The liberals overthrew the communists and shelled the parliament in the 1990s, and they aren't going to allow the Red Return, I was told by a member of the Russian parliament, the Duma.

Moreover, the people took the outcome in their stride. There were no big rallies or demos; true, they were forbidden, but people accepted the prohibition rather meekly. There is no revolution coming, not even big protests. Apparently, the Russians have reconciled themselves to this 'limited democracy'. So did we all: from Australia to the US, from France to Germany, real democracy has died. Instead, we have sanitary tyranny with some face-saving 'elections' corrected by massive election fraud.

Russians think they are doing fine. People have their salaries, their cars, their country houses; the cities are in good shape, there is not much of unemployment. Before the elections, the obedient Covid almost vanished; now it is likely to reappear, but that is the case everywhere in the world. So there are no strong motives for protest, like it was in 1991 or even in 2011. More and more people come to conclusion that the elections are just a farce. But it is not enough

to move people for revolution.

I spoke to some people close to the Kremlin; they told me that they think Putin went into hiding because of the elections, as his security people weren't certain how the masses would respond to the election fraud. It could be a replay of 1991, when huge masses of people overthrew Soviet rule. Now we see that it did not happen. People took it laying down. But security likes to overplay their hand. In Washington, London and Moscow, there are more police than protesters at practically any rally.

One week after the elections, and they were totally forgotten. On the day the results were published, there was a mass shooting; an 18-year-old man took a hunting gun and shot six students in his school. Such terrorist attacks conveniently occur when there is a need for drastic change of the agenda, and there are enough mentally troubled men to do a massacre unless stopped.

## **Conclusion**

We do not know for sure why Putin decided to claim that he has to self-isolate. It is not totally impossible (though unlikely) that there is indeed an outbreak of Covid. Otherwise, it could be connected with the election uncertainty or with the pending Putin-Xi summit, or, indeed, a plot was discovered. Most probably Putin will emerge out of his shelter by September 29th, for his summit with President Erdogan, as they have much to discuss. But his seclusion won't gain him brownie points in the eyes of Russians.

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