

INTERNAL STABILITY OF THE STATE STRUCTURE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: THE POSITION OF ELITES AND CENTRIFUGAL TENDENCIES

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The goal is to analyse the internal stability of the Russian state system in terms of the impact of international sanctions, existing centrifugal trends in the regions (or in general – the presence or absence of these trends), current processes among the Russian elite and its readiness to support V. Putin.

The objective is to provide conclusions on the political and diplomatic efforts of Ukraine and its partners to put pressure on Russia.

Summary

The analytical report on the stability of the Russian Federation's state system and the behaviour of elites depicts the situation among Russian socio-political elites who influence the processes within the Russian Federation and the country's foreign policy.

The study proceeds from the fact that in the Ukrainian information landscape and in the statements of Ukrainian military and political leadership officials, an optimistic view of the high level of internal conflictogenicity of socio-economic relations within Russia, which may result in a loss of governance between the centre of the Russian Federation and the constituent entities of the country, is being spread and popularised between late 2022 and mid-2024.

The level of this conflictogenicity is allegedly influenced by the behaviour of different parts of the political and economic elite of the Russian Federation, which may be dissatisfied with the actions of the central government of the federation and convert this dissatisfaction into certain behaviour, which in turn will lead to the emergence and materialisation of "centrifugal tendencies" – that is, the deterioration of governance relations between the centre and the subjects of the federation.

In order to test this hypothesis, the article presents information on the configuration and changes in the environment of the Russian political elites after the presidential elections in May 2024, in which Vladimir Putin was re-elected.

Problem analysis

The study of the relationships between different political actors in the Russian Federation is significantly complicated by several circumstances that do not allow for sufficiently informed conclusions about the events and processes taking place inside the country.

Firstly, over the past 25 years, during which V. Putin has been directly influencing absolutely all processes in Russia, the role of Russian special services in all spheres of socio-economic and political life has increased to the maximum possible extent. At the same time, all processes involving representatives of law enforcement agencies and intelligence services are non-public and can be interpreted in two or three ways. Information about individuals, their decisions, actions, behaviour and influence on the processes remains completely hidden. All political processes leading to any decision-making take place behind the scenes and are not directly covered in open sources.

Therefore, all studies and views on the events taking place in Russia are the result of published information that may be the result of manipulation (e.g., opinion polls or statistical economic indicators), or presented by experts who do not actually live in Russia and indirectly assess the processes taking place there, using unreliable sources of information for analysis.

In other words, the analysis of the internal situation in Russia is, in fact, “guessing on coffee grounds”.

Secondly, the propaganda aspect of communications, which can be used by both sides, should be taken into account. For example, on 24 July 2024, The Guardian published an article signed by European finance ministers:

- Elisabeth Svantesson, Minister for Finance, Sweden
- Stephanie Lose, Minister for Economic Affairs, Denmark
- Mart Võrklaev, Minister of Finance, Estonia
- Riikka Purra, Minister of Finance, Finland
- Arvils Ašeradens, Minister of Finance, Latvia
- Gintarė Skaistė, Minister of Finance, Lithuania
- Eelco Heinen, Minister of Finance, the Netherlands
- Andrzej Domański, Minister of Finance, Poland

The article is titled “*Russia is lying about its economic strength: sanctions are working – and we need more*”¹ and presents the position of the finance ministers on the state of the Russian economy.

According to the ministers, Russia is actually sacrificing its future development for the sake of its current success in being able to finance the war. In general, the finance ministers refer to the ongoing processes as “re-Sovietisation of the economy” – that is, a repetition of the mechanisms and instruments used in the Soviet Union.

The position of the finance ministers on the weakening of the Russian economy is mostly optimistic. However, some experts who were promptly interviewed about the assessments given in the article emphasise that for European ministers, this material is primarily a communication tool to support their own policies among the EU population, while the facts and their interpretation play a secondary role.

The ministers promote the success of the sanctions and the need to strengthen them, which is in Ukraine’s interest. However, the real situation in the Russian economy, according to the experts surveyed, is not as catastrophic as the European finance ministers write about.

Finally, experts who assess the processes inside Russia are influenced by their sources and their context of activity, which makes it difficult to provide a sufficiently effective analysis of the processes inside Russia.

Flaws in Methodologies for Analysing the Sustainability of the Russian Federation’s State System

The methodology of analysing Russian elites, which has developed among Russian political scientists, as well as among Ukrainian and Western researchers, has its origins in the practices of “Kremlinology” or “Sovietology” – interdisciplinary practices that were devoted to the study of the dynamics of relations in the ruling elite of the Soviet Union.

One of the most public and popular Russian political scientists today, Evgeny Minchenko, CEO of Minchenko Consulting, even called his regular report on the state of Russian elites “Politburo 2.0”, hinting that the process of making and implementing political decisions in the ruling elite of Russia is similar to the way the Politburo and the Central Committee of the Soviet Union worked.

Another aspect of traditional approaches to analysing processes in Russia is a memetic proverb that has been spreading for many decades: “*The Kremlin has many towers*”. It means that the Kremlin is outwardly built as a fortress with about 20 tall structures (towers), but

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/24/russia-economic-growth-western-sanctions-vladimir-putin-moscow>

figuratively it means that the consensus of the ruling elite in Russia is achieved by balancing the interests of various groups of influence, which are supposedly represented by the “towers of the Kremlin”. That is, the state of the political situation in Russia is a consequence of constant interaction between the “Kremlin towers” – different groups.

Thus, it can be assumed that the “re-Sovietisation of the economy” mentioned by European finance ministers, the use of the term “Politburo 2.0”, and the formation of analytics on the internal situation in Russia by identifying the main groups of influence demonstrate that the work on studying information about the internal Russian agenda is often based on long-established stereotypes.

For example, the report of the Ukrainian Institute for the Future of March 2023 entitled “Kremlin Towers”² identifies six groups of influence, the interaction between which forms the context of the internal elite agenda in Russia. Among these groups, the report names the following: “Security forces”, “MIC” group, “Gazprom” and “Rosneft” groups, the Kovalchuks group and Technocrats, Yeltsin’s “Family” group.

Reports³ by the Russian political scientist Evgeny Minchenko classify the actors in the political elites as:

- “**Politburo 2.0 members**” are a wide range of members of the ruling clans and policy makers
- “**Candidates for Politburo 2.0**” are an even wider range of people who do not influence policy-making but are close to the decision-making and implementation process
- “**Central Committee members**” are the most influential members of the ruling nomenklatura.

Ongoing discussions in the expert community and their inconsistent variability demonstrate that, while certain verticals and group dynamics among those closest to Vladimir Putin do exist, they are always much more complex, and it is counterproductive to simplify them to interactions between groups and to discuss only certain “collective clans” and the competition and interaction between them.

At the same time, the recent personnel reshuffle in the Russian Federation after Vladimir Putin’s re-election may indicate the need to satisfy the interests of some groups of influence at the expense of other groups. For example, the removal of Nikolai Patrushev from the post of Secretary of the Russian National Security and Defence Council and the simultaneous promotion of his son Dmitry Patrushev from Minister to Deputy Chairman of the Russian

² <https://uifuture.org/publications/vezhi-kremlya-hto-bude-dilyty-spadok-putina/>

³ https://minchenko.ru/netcat_files/userfiles/Politbyuro/NEW_Doklad_Politbyuro_2_0_korotkaya_versiya_2JUNE2024.pdf

Government should be considered together and assessed as a reduction in the opportunities for N. Patrushev and the promotion of his son as a “prize for the best”.

Overview of Russian political elites

One of the most recent reports by Minchenko Consulting, Politburo 2.0, was released after Vladimir Putin’s re-election⁴, reflecting changes in the personnel composition of certain groups in the Russian president’s environment. Given the shortcomings of the methodological approach, it is also worth paying attention to certain aspects highlighted by Russian political scientists. Their approach to analysis can be explained by the fact that all decisions in the Russian Federation regarding influence and resource allocation are made centrally, and in order to make a decision, someone from V. Putin’s inner circle must take a certain person of a lower rank under his protectorate to ensure that he is given some authority or resources. This mechanism creates the patron-client dyad, which is part of the established vertical of a clan and is highlighted by researchers.

According to Minchenko, the “members of the Politburo 2.0.”, who represent the leaders of different clans, are the following persons:

- Arkady Rotenberg;
- Gennady Timchenko;
- Mikhail Mishustin;
- Yuriy Kovalchuk;
- Sergey Chemezov;
- Dmitry Medvedev;
- Sergey Sobyarin;
- Sergey Kiriyenko;
- Igor Sechin;
- Nikolai Patrushev;
- Sergey Shoigu.

Such a simplistic approach to the construction of the Russian elite does not stand up to any criticism and does not reflect real processes. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to abandon the “clan” or “tower” approach in the process of considering and researching the structure of Russian elites. It is advisable to analyse the real personnel changes that took place after the Russian presidential election.

⁴ https://minchenko.ru/netcat_files/userfiles/Politbyuro/NEW_Doklad_Politbyuro_2_0_korotkaya_versiya_2JUNE2024.pdf

Territorial and centrifugal principle of structuring Russian elites

At the outset, it is necessary to note the background of the formation of political elites in the centre and periphery of the Russian Federation. Traditionally, the formation of political elites has been marked by the ability to influence the decision-making process and access to the use and distribution of resources. Taking these aspects into account, the activities of the central government of the Russian Federation in the first half of the 1990s were focused on preserving the integrity of the federation and preventing any processes of subjectivisation and sovereigntisation in the regions.

The key document for this moment is the “Federal Treaty”⁵ of 31.03.1992 “*Treaty on the Delimitation of Subjects of Jurisdiction and Powers between the Federal Bodies of State Power of the Russian Federation and the Authorities of the Sovereign Republics within the Russian Federation*”.

The second key document is *the Constitution of the Russian Federation* of 12.12.1993. It was the process of formulating the norms of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and Boris Yeltsin’s keen desire to personally provide himself with tools of influence on various branches of power and on the regions that laid the foundations for the authoritarian turn of the Russian Federation, which was actually made in the process of President Boris Yeltsin’s pressure on various groups of lawyers who were developing the basic law of the Russian Federation.

It was at that time that the main levers of influence on Russia’s democratic development were formulated and the possibilities of concentrating power in the hands of the president were created. Among other things, the imbalance between the centre and the federal subjects was established.

In addition, the Constitution of the Russian Federation contained wording that did not reflect the real state of affairs. For example, Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation states that “*The names Russian Federation and Russia are equivalent*”.

Such wording cannot be true, because, for example, the signatory to the “Federal Treaty” – the Republic of Tatarstan, where a referendum on independence from Moscow was held on 21 March 1992, voluntarily agreed to be part of a federal state called the Russian Federation.

However, the Republic of Tatarstan cannot be part of Russia. Even in the text of the “Federal Treaty”, the word “Russia” is nowhere mentioned, while the main subject of the “Federal Treaty” is the Russian Federation.

⁵ https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_120324/https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_120324/

This may mean that the wording of Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation was forced through with the help of administrative influence to give the federal system the nature of a unitary mono-ethnic state.

The same applies to the wording of Article 3, paragraph 1, of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which states that “*The bearer of sovereignty and the sole source of power in the Russian Federation is its multinational people*”.

The phrase “multinational people” is constantly mentioned by Vladimir Putin in his speeches, although other parts of the state apparatus, including the State Duma, are raising initiatives to replace the phrase “multinational people” with “Russian people”, with the aim of de facto colonial rule over other ethnic groups in the federation and prioritising the titular nation.

The next stress test for the stability of the Russian Federation’s state system was the presidential elections in June-July 1996, when, in order to prevent the election of the leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Gennady Zyuganov, Yeltsin united around representatives of big business (the so-called “Semibankirschina” or “seven bankers”), who had managed to generate huge fortunes in the first years of independence against the background of the impoverishment of the Russian people.

On the eve of the presidential elections in 1995, the Russian Federation held so-called collateral auctions, where wealthy businessmen were able to appropriate large property complexes by obtaining state-owned stakes in large Russian enterprises, including oil companies such as Yukos and Sibnet and manufacturing companies such as Norilsk Nickel.

This historical episode has recently become very resonant with the Russian-speaking audience due to the documentary film “The Traitors” by Maria Pevchikh, a representative of the opposition Russian Anti-Corruption Foundation.

Having gained ownership of large property complexes, the newest Russian oligarchs began to shape the configuration of political elites, effectively taking over the country’s state processes.

Due to his poor health and significant fears of political persecution after the next presidential elections, Boris Yeltsin and his inner circle chose Vladimir Putin as a presidential candidate and Prime Minister of the Russian Federation in the hope that he would be able to ensure the security of the so-called “Family” – Yeltsin’s inner circle.

Since 1999, when Vladimir Putin took over the leadership of the Russian Federation, and until now, the political and business elites at both the federal and local levels have been continuously reshaping. In this process, V. Putin deliberately maintains a high level of competition, but systematically saturates both the state apparatus and business representatives with people loyal to him personally.

For example, in 2000-2001, at Vladimir Putin's suggestion, the political system changed, as the governors of the federal subjects elected in free elections could pose a threat to the unlimited power of the centre. The political representation of the regions was carried out through the upper house of the Russian parliament (Senate), the Federation Council, which, among other things, is authorised to approve the use of armed forces outside Russia, ratify peace agreements and resolve a number of other issues of war and peace.

In fact, from the first year of Vladimir Putin's presidency, a programme called "strengthening the vertical" was announced. This means cutting off regional political leaders – governors and local legislative assemblies – from federal policy. Instead of governors, federal subjects were represented in the Federation Council by "authorised representatives". Governors lost the ability to lobby directly for the interests of their regions. The same can be said of the representative of the "legislative assembly" of the region (each federal subject was delegated to the Senate of the Russian Federation by a representative of the executive and legislative branches). A special mention should be made of those senators who were appointed by Vladimir Putin personally for life.

Instead, in 2000, the role of another representative body, the State Council, was strengthened. In 2020, on Putin's initiative, the State Council was enshrined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. It is given quite a lot of importance, as in terms of political influence, controllability and connection with the president, the State Council surpasses both the State Duma and the Federation Council. Thus, Putin completed the work started by Boris Yeltsin, namely, the complete curtailment of the subjectivity of regional elites at the federal level.

In 2004, at the suggestion of the Russian president, the State Duma and the Federation Council cancelled the election of regional heads. Since 2005, the candidacy of a regional head has been proposed by the Russian president and approved by local legislative assemblies.

Prior to that, a regional clan or oligarchic group could put its representative through the elections, or rival clans could strike a balance on their own and without the intervention of the centre, or enter into a struggle for control of the region, including through the promotion of "their" governors. Since 2005, only the clan and the candidate for governor who had passed a kind of casting in the Kremlin and was personally approved by V. Putin could win in such competition. This system lasted until 2012 and, given the five-year term of office of the head of a federal subject, all heads of Russian regions passed through the "approval" sieve. In other words, the Kremlin established a system of control over regional elites.

Direct gubernatorial elections were only brought back in 2012. The relevant law was passed a few months before Dmitry Medvedev's term as president ended. However, by that time, the autonomy of the regions and regional elites was significantly limited. In the political field, the Kremlin's "supervision" and in the economic field, changes in Russia's tax system (in 2005-2010) caused the federal subjects to lose control over a significant part of their financial flows.

In particular, changes in the taxation of raw material companies, redistribution of tax revenues (export tax instead of the subsoil tax, increase and creation of holdings with “Moscow” or “St. Petersburg” registration, changes in the procedure for distributing VAT and excise duties) led to the regions becoming dependent on central funding.

Local elites now acted as beggars, while the Kremlin made decisions on regional funding. Direct elections no longer carried risks for the federal centre. At the moment, most regions of the Russian Federation are headed by so-called “parachutists”, people who have never lived or worked in the region before running for governor or other leadership positions. More than 80 per cent of the current governors have never lived or worked in the region they lead.

To achieve this effect, the Kremlin is repeating the scheme used when Vladimir Putin came to power. 7-8 months before the day of regional elections, the current head of the federal subject resigns, and the president appoints an acting head, who subsequently wins the election thanks to administrative resources and direct support from the Presidential Administration, which in these cases is currently represented by the First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, Sergey Kiriyenko.

Along with the resumption of gubernatorial elections, control over the formation of the Federation Council was tightened in 2012. Before the election, a candidate for governor must submit a list of three people, the first of whom, if he or she wins the election, will become a “senator” (the other two will be “alternates”). At the same time, the head of a federal subject has no right to withdraw his or her representative from the Federation Council. Another candidate for senator from a region is a representative from the legislative assembly – one of its deputies. After being elected as a senator, in the absence of a recall mechanism, he also loses his dependence on regional elites. Thus, most of the members of the Federation Council are directly or indirectly appointed by the President of the Russian Federation.

Another pillar of the internal elite consensus in the Russian Federation is the functioning of the lower house of the Russian parliament, the State Duma, where the United Russia party (UR), headed by former President Dmitry Medvedev, maintains control over decision-making. The party nominates Vladimir Putin for the presidency of the Russian Federation.

The party was established on 1 December 2001, but in 2004-2007, the State Duma made significant amendments to the Law on Political Parties, which effectively cemented the United Russia’s leadership in Russia without alternative. These amendments included an increase in the number of party members to 50,000 with the condition that party members must have at least 500 members in at least half of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and at least 250 members in other constituent entities; cancellation of the right of electoral associations to form electoral blocs; prohibition of political parties to nominate candidates from other political parties; cancellation of public observation of elections; and a 7% threshold. The existence of opposition political forces has become impossible.

Today, the party's structure will consist of regional, local and primary branches of the party, which are its structural units and operate on the basis of the current Charter. Regional branches of the United Russia party have been established in all constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and there are currently more than 82,500 primary and 2,500 local branches of the party. The Chairman of the party's Supreme Council is Boris Gryzlov (Chairman of the Board of Directors of Tactical Missile Arms Corporation, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Belarus). Any Russian citizen who wants to advance his or her career must be a member of the United Russia party.

Thus, it is crucial to note that the word "federation" does not define the essence of the Russian state, as regional elites were initially excluded from collective decision-making at the central level, and they were also excluded from managing financial flows and disposing of resources, including on their "own" territory. The only chance of internal elite advancement for representatives of regional elites is to become part of the ecosystem of the central federal elite. In this case, even if they return to their region or republic, such a representative of the local elite will already be a representative of the interests of the "centre".

In fact, all decisions at the federal level are made by people who are loyal and devoted to the Presidential Administration and to the president personally, since he made the decision to appoint them. The same can be said about regional leaders – governors and the core of the State Duma, representatives of the United Russia party.

Thus, the decision to use the Russian Armed Forces outside the Russian Federation and to invade Ukraine was made by Vladimir Putin alone and had no chance for discussion about its correctness. In this context, it is important to stress and emphasise that the constant statements of opposition-minded Russians living in Western countries about the hope and possibility of democratisation of processes in Russia and fair elections are absolutely groundless, as the first step towards democratisation is to return subjectivity to regional elites by restoring their right to control their own resources, financial flows and personnel policies.

Such changes may be called "re-federalisation". However, when using this word, representatives of opposition-minded Russian organisations in the EU avoid discussing the return of full power and control to representatives of regional elites. One of the most interesting reports compiled by representatives of the Russian opposition in exile under the auspices of the Free Russia Foundation, Vladimir Milov and Fedor Krasheninnikov, is "*The Normal Russia of The Future: Yes, We Can*"⁶. In this report, the authors point out a number of important aspects of the return of the Russian Federation to the characteristics of a federal state.

⁶ <https://thinktank.4freerussia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/10/normalrussia-web.pdf>

Strengthening resilience or imbalance: personnel changes after V. Putin's re-election in May 2024

The personnel movements at the level of federal bodies of the Russian Federation that took place in May 2024 provide significant empirical material for assessing elite dynamics in modern Russia. In many ways, personnel movements are a unique way to comparatively measure the resources of elite groups of influence in a closed decision-making system.

Traditionally, all the forecasts and hypotheses that have been put forward regarding Vladimir Putin's personnel decisions have proved to be wrong or inaccurate. Experts say that this outcome of forecasts that do not reflect reality is repeated regularly. It is almost impossible to predict decisions at the federal level.

The least competitive areas are foreign policy and security, where V. Putin personally fine-tunes the decision-making and implementation system. In addition, the overlapping of responsibilities and the creation of parallel structures of mutual control by different agencies and officials are being implemented so that competition between them can provide Putin with a more comprehensive picture. However, even these measures are not proving to be effective.

After Vladimir Putin's re-election, he dismissed one of his former closest associates, Sergey Shoigu, from the post of defence minister and appointed him secretary of the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC). His place as Defence Minister was taken by former First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian government Andrey Belousov, who had long been close to Putin, having previously held a post in the Russia's Presidential Administration.

In the spring of 2024, a number of anonymous sources reported that Sergey Shoigu was privately lobbying for the creation of a Russian Ministry of Defence Industry, which could control and spend the huge budget of the Russian defence industry, which sometimes amounts to up to 20% of Russia's GDP. For Shoigu, this would be a convenient way to increase his control over resources and, at the same time, move to a less toxic position not directly related to the war effort. S. Shoigu's team, including Timur Ivanov and Ruslan Tsalikov, who had been deputy ministers of the Russian Defence Ministry and are now under investigation, were supposed to move to the same place. In addition, there were also reports that during his visits to the defence industry enterprises controlled by Rostec Corporation, S. Shoigu was severely criticising the inefficient use of the capabilities of these enterprises, which should have been able to provide products for the Russian Armed Forces much faster.

At the same time, at the moment, almost the entire budget for the production of new technological military products is controlled by the Rostec Corporation, headed by Sergey Chemezov, one of the closest people to Vladimir Putin.

Denis Manturov, who previously worked at Rostec enterprises and later as Minister of Industry and Trade, was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian government

to replace Andrey Belousov. D. Manturov is close to Sergey Chemezov, although there are also expert comments about conflicts between them. However, after V. Putin's re-election as president, he held one of his first working meetings with Chemezov and Manturov, demonstrating publicly his special attention to this area of the Russian government's work.

In other words, the issue of control over financial and industrial resources during a full-scale war, which sometimes amount to 20-30% of Russia's GDP, was resolved in favour of a certain group of people. While other representatives of the Russian elite lost in this power game.

In particular, the following changes in the Russian government should be noted.

1. The Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FS MTC), which was previously subordinated to the Ministry of Defence, was removed from the MoD by a decree of Vladimir Putin. The Director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation is Dmitry Shugaev, who, like Manturov, previously worked in the structures of the state corporation Rostec. Despite the fact that the FS MTC was re-subordinated to the Secretariat of the Russian National Security and Defence Council (headed by Sergey Shoigu), its direct supervisor was Aleksey Dyumin, the former governor of the Tula region, who was transferred to the Russia's Presidential Administration. As a result of these reshuffles, Sergey Shoigu did not receive additional power.
2. Anna Tsivilyova, who is Vladimir Putin's niece and the head of the Defenders of the Fatherland Foundation, was appointed Deputy Minister of Defence. She was later promoted to the post of State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence. At the Ministry of Defence, she will be in charge of social issues, including overseeing her foundation. A significant portion of the financial revenues to the foundation was officially spent on ensuring the vital activity of the foundation itself (salaries, rent, events, payment for specialist psychologists). At the same time, Anna Tsivilyova is the wife of the newly appointed Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation, former Governor of the Kemerovo region, Sergey Tsivilyov, whose identity was discussed in anonymous telegram channels in the context of his appointment as Prime Minister.
3. Sergey Tsivilyov, appointed Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation in May 2024, served as Governor of the Kemerovo region from 2018 to 2024. Tsivilyov's family was involved in the coal mining business through Kolmar, a coal mining company in Yakutia. Before becoming the governor of the Kemerovo region, Tsivilyov was a co-owner and CEO of Kolmar. Gennady Timchenko, who is close to Vladimir Putin, was a co-owner of Kolmar through his investment company Volga Group, which owns 30% of Kolmar's shares. Tsivilyov and Timchenko's business partnership in Kolmar reflects a common interest in the coal industry, which has significant political and economic implications given the importance of the coal industry in Russia. Objectively, however, the industry is currently in decline due to the

- complexity of its supply chains. Nevertheless, Gennady Timchenko's administrative strengthening could result in an increase in liquefied natural gas supplies to Europe.
4. Key changes took place in the Ministry of Defence and the Presidential Administration. In addition to the appointment of Andrey Belousov, who has no team, and Anna Tsivilyova as Defence Minister, Pavel Fradkov, the younger son of the former head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service and former Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, was appointed to replace Deputy Defence Minister Timur Ivanov, who is under investigation. Since 2021, Pavel Fradkov has worked as First Deputy Chief of the Presidential Administration, i.e. in charge of the economic part of the Administration. In the Ministry of Defence, Fradkov will be responsible for managing property, land resources and construction of facilities for the needs of the Ministry of Defence and the national economy, i.e., for what Timur Ivanov was responsible for. Mikhail Fradkov's eldest son, Petr Fradkov, is the head of Promsvyazbank, a key bank for the Russian military-industrial complex, which operates in the occupied territories of Ukraine and also serves the military.
 5. Leonid Gornin, who previously served as Anton Siluanov's first deputy finance minister, has been appointed as another first deputy defence minister. Gornin will deal with the entire range of issues related to the financial support of the Russian armed forces. In the Ministry of Finance, Gornin was also responsible for the regions and for state defence procurement. In the Ministry of Finance, he proved himself to be a technocrat, a bureaucrat who rose on his skills, and a professional man. This appointment means that the Ministry of Defence has become the largest recipient of budget funds, with military spending on the army alone exceeding 10 trillion rubles in 2024, which is slightly less than a third of all federal budget expenditure. And in the 2025 budget, defence spending is set to increase even further.
 6. A new structure of the Russian presidential administration has been approved. Former presidential assistant for economic policy Maxim Oreshkin was appointed deputy head of the presidential administration to Anton Vaino. Nikolai Patrushev and Aleksey Dyumin were appointed as presidential assistants. A number of presidential departments were restructured⁷. According to a presidential decree, five departments were established in the Presidential Administration: for monitoring and analysis of social processes; for national maritime policy; for the formation and operation of the State Council; for state policy in the humanitarian sphere; and for state policy in the defence industry.
 7. Former Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev was appointed V. Putin's assistant, who will be in charge of shipbuilding. On 13 August 2024, Vladimir Putin

⁷ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202406120009>

issued a decree establishing the Presidential Administration for Maritime Policy⁸. Sergey Vakhrukov, who is close to Patrushev, became its head. By another decree on the same day, Putin established the Maritime Board of the Russian Federation⁹ to replace the Interdepartmental Commission of the Russian National Security and Defence Council on Ensuring the Interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic and the Maritime Board under the Russian Government, which was headed by Nikolai Patrushev. At the same time, Nikolai Patrushev remained a member of the Russian National Security and Defence Council¹⁰. Nikolai Patrushev's son, Dmitry Patrushev, was promoted to the post of Vice Prime Minister of the Russian government, while Oksana Lut, who was Dmitry Patrushev's first deputy in his previous position, remained Minister of Agriculture.

8. The former governor of Tula region, who previously served as deputy head of the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Defence Ministry (i.e., the Russian military intelligence agency GRU), commander of the Special Forces of the Russian Defence Ministry and deputy minister of defence, Aleksey Dyumin, like Nikolai Patrushev, was appointed assistant to the president of the Russian Federation, secretary of the State Council and curator of the defence industry. Dyumin will coordinate the Office of the President of the Russian Federation for the Formation and Operation of the State Council and the Office of the President of the Russian Federation for State Policy in the Defence Industry. Viktor Yevtukhov, former Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of Denis Manturov, has been appointed as the head of the Directorate for State Policy in the Defence Industry. Experts say that Yevtukhov is close to the ecosystem of officials favourable to Sergey Chemezov (Rostec).
9. The State Council Support Department, headed by Sergey Kiriyenko's closest ally, Alexander Kharychev, was split into two parts. Prior to the split, the structure managed by Kharychev organised the campaigns of government candidates in elections at various levels, conducted sociological research, and managed the work of Kremlin think tanks. The department also organised meetings of the State Council, but this was not its main goal. Instead, Alexander Kharychev was entrusted with the responsibility for monitoring and analysing social processes. Most likely, Kiriyenko also lobbied for the creation of this department so that his closest associate would not be partially subordinate to presidential assistant Aleksey Dyumin, who was entrusted with the supervision of the State Council. The State Council's Affairs Directorate was transferred to the former head of the expert department, Vladimir Symonenko. In other words, the areas of responsibility of Dyumin and Kiriyenko were prudently divided to avoid conflicts.

⁸ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202408130007?index=1>

⁹ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202408130022>

¹⁰ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202406110034?index=1>

10. The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, has updated the composition of the Military-Industrial Commission of the Russian Federation¹¹ and its board, as well as the regulations on the Commission for Military-Technical Cooperation (MTC)¹² and its composition¹³. The new Minister of Industry and Trade Anton Alikhanov, the new Minister of Defence Andrey Belousov and the new Presidential Assistant Aleksey Dyumin were appointed to the Military-Industrial Commission. In addition, there have been updates to the statuses of Denis Manturov (First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian government) and Maxim Oreshkin (Deputy Head of the Russia's Presidential Administration). Nikolai Patrushev was removed from the Military Industrial Commission of the Russian Federation. The Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation of the Russian Federation was headed by Vladimir Putin personally, and his deputies in the Commission were Denis Manturov and Sergey Shoigu (ex officio). The MTC Commission included Defence Minister Andrey Belousov, FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov, Minister of Industry and Trade Anton Alikhanov, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev, Head of the FIS Sergey Naryshkin and others.

11. Former Governor of the Kaliningrad region Anton Alikhanov was appointed Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation, as he had already worked in this ministry and is apparently close to Denis Manturov. At a meeting of the Bureau of the Union of Machine Builders held in mid-June 2024, Alikhanov stated that those enterprises that allegedly fail to comply with the schedules of deliveries of military products under their obligations, which are under the control of the military-industrial complex board, may be punished, up to and including a change of ownership. Anton Alikhanov has been tasked with ensuring that all companies involved in the supply of military goods strictly comply with the plans of the defence industry. It should be noted that Sergey Chemezov is also the head of the Union of Machine Builders of Russia.

Thus, by making these personnel changes, Vladimir Putin optimised the vertical of state management of the warfare resource base, whose main task is to ensure the smooth and successful functioning of the Russian military-industrial complex. The following officials are part of this management vertical:

- Sergey Chemezov, Chairman of the Rostec Corporation;
- Denis Manturov, First Vice Prime Minister of the Russian Government;
- Aleksey Dyumin, Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation in charge of the defence industry;

¹¹ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202406110035>

¹² <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202406110036>

¹³ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/document/0001202406110037>

- Viktor Yevtukhov, Head of the Presidential Directorate for State Policy in the Defence Industry;
- Nikolai Patrushev, Assistant to the President of the Russian Federation;
- Dmitry Shugaev, Director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation;
- Andrey Belousov, Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation;
- Pavel Fradkov, Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation;
- Anton Alikhanov, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation.

The operational and administrative potential of this vertical is made up of people close to Sergey Chemezov's circle: Denis Manturov, Viktor Yevtukhov, and Dmitry Shugaev. The power vertical also has a place for younger personnel – Anton Alikhanov (37) and Pavel Fradkov (42).

Given the above, it can be concluded that the main financial, economic and managerial efforts of the Russian Federation government will be directed at maximising the development and strengthening of the technological and managerial component of the defence industry, which may indicate a strategic decision to continue fighting and increasing pressure on Western countries indefinitely.

The personnel reconfiguration of the political elites of the federal centre was accompanied by signs of expansion of the “candidates for Politburo 2.0.”, which means a renewal of the personal composition of decision-makers. Representatives of the families of the new generation of the current elite took up some positions. Evgeny Minchenko calls them “princes”. They include Dmitry Patrushev, the Fradkov brothers, Anna Tsivilyova, and the new chairman of the Accounts Chamber of Russia, Boris Kovalchuk, the son of Yuriy Kovalchuk.

The main personnel changes were aimed at consolidating the balance of elites within the government and increasing the importance of the economic balance between the military and civilian sectors in optimising resources.

Special mention should be made of the intensive work of Russian Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov, who is actually responsible for coordinating the global redistribution of property in Russia through lawsuits over illegal privatisation of assets.

This process of de facto nationalisation of private assets needs to be discussed separately, as the actual “state robbery” is forming a galaxy of entrepreneurs and their entourage who are deeply dissatisfied with the actions of the Putin government. At the same time, there is no objective information on the property complexes that were taken away in favour of the state, nor are there lists of shareholders affected by such actions. This aspect requires a separate in-depth study, as it can provide more information about the dynamics of loyalty and disloyalty to the Kremlin.

Key aspects of the internal stability of the Russian Federation

Based on the above analysis, the main aspects of potential vulnerabilities that could cause destabilising processes within the Russian Federation should be noted.

Such vulnerabilities are traditionally considered by the expert community to be:

1. The potential for a “palace coup” inspired by an intra-elite conflict that could lead to the use of violence to assert leadership.
2. Increased tension between the federal centre and the regions (subjects of the Russian Federation), which could result from low management capacity in times of crisis, such as the Prigozhin riot or the events in the Kursk region.
3. Socio-political sentiments among the population, which can allegedly influence the decision-making process of local and central elites.

Consider each of these vulnerabilities separately.

The hypothesis of an “**Elite Fronde**” that could result in Vladimir Putin’s resignation from the Russian presidency emerged almost immediately after the start of the full-scale invasion.

The potential, at least financially, for such a scenario did exist, but the strategy of the West and Ukraine for total confrontation, which included indiscriminate sanctions against all Russians and all Russian oligarchs, levelled any prospects for separate contacts with certain parts of Russia’s financial elites to plan measures that contradicted Kremlin policy.

Despite this, expert circles continued to hope for an internal coup in the Kremlin, although there were no objective grounds for it.

The actions of the leader of the Wagner group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and the so-called “March of Justice” and the seizure of the command of the Southern Military District in Rostov-on-Don can be considered such a coup to some extent. These events were facilitated by a long-lasting and media-exposed public conflict between Yevgeny Prigozhin and Sergey Shoigu, which could have been supported by other Russian political and domestic elite actors.

The former deputy chief of the Russian Defence Ministry’s GRU, Aleksey Dyumin, and the first deputy chief of the Russian Defence Ministry’s GRU, Vladimir Alekseyev, played important roles in the coup. Both of them were at the origins of the Wagner Group and provided actual operational leadership of the Wagner Group’s activities in different parts of the world. There are unconfirmed reports of a significant conflict between the Wagner Group’s supervisors and Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu, and of direct communication between the leadership of the Russian Defence Ministry’s GRU and President Vladimir Putin, bypassing the Russian Defence Ministry, which could also have strained the situation.

As a result, Sergey Shoigu was dismissed from the post of Defence Minister and effectively barred from managing the processes of spending massive amounts of money on the defence

industry. Instead, Dyumin was appointed to a position in the key body of the Russian Federation – the Presidential Administration – and is responsible for coordinating the defence industry and the activities of the State Council.

Thus, potential splits within the political elites are possible, but they are unlikely to threaten Vladimir Putin's general policy line. On the contrary, such situations may strengthen the centralisation of power, given that the Ukrainian government and governments of democratic countries do not take measures to develop preparedness for such cases to potentially use them to their advantage.

The potential for disintegration or centrifugal processes that could result from tensions between the centre and the federal subjects is also seen by some experts as a promising goal. However, there are also insufficient objective grounds to consider this course of events as a working model, as in-depth analyses of Russia's regions are either closed or not conducted at all.

It should be noted, as mentioned above, that in 80% of the regional centres of the Russian Federation subjects, key management roles are played by so-called “parachutists” – leaders who were appointed to run these regions without having any ties to local elites. Thus, local elites are forced to be more loyal to the centre in order to be able to lobby for their own issues and influence the allocation of resources.

Domestic policy issues are comprehensively coordinated by First Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration Sergey Kiriyenko, who has at his disposal the Presidential Domestic Policy Directorate, headed by Andrey Yarin. It is Kiriyenko who is in charge of elections in Russia and the appointment of governors. Kiriyenko is also the curator of a number of leadership training projects, including the so-called “school of governors” based on the programme for the development of the managerial reserve of the Higher School of Public Administration (HSPA) of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration. Some graduates of this programme hold positions both as governors and in the federal government.

One way or another, thanks to the systematic approach of promoting elite representatives loyal to the central government and the long-term deprivation of regional elites' interests, the loss of control or destabilisation of relations between the centre and the constituent entities of the Russian Federation can only result from some extraordinary course of events that will jeopardise the future of local elites. At the moment, there are no such catastrophic processes.

The development of a hypothesis about **people's riots and protests**, as well as the study of sociological slices of public sentiment in the Russian Federation related to public dissatisfaction with changes in the current situation inside the Russian Federation, is also one of the three areas in the approach to studying the stability of the Russian state system.

According to experts, Russian society can be divided into 15% of the so-called “ultra-patriots” who are truly deeply loyal to any format of the Kremlin’s policy, 15% of those who are undecided and can still assess different scenarios, but mostly support Russian policy, and 70% of those who represent the indifferent masses who will act as they are told.

Some experts emphasise that indirect (“false flag”) communications with the 15% of Russian citizens who are hesitant and may be somewhat disoriented, should be used to ensure that they mostly refrain from directly supporting the Kremlin’s actions. For instance, they tried to avoid mobilisation.

This hypothesis is extremely widespread among a number of Ukrainian specialists and Western experts, and is actively fuelled by representatives of the Russian opposition abroad. However, there is still insufficient evidence that public discontent on the part of society or its groups can in any way influence the decision-making process of the Russian Federation’s political elites.

Examples include the mass protests in Khabarovsk in connection with the arrest of Governor Sergey Furgal; riots in Makhachkala in connection with a religious conflict and a reaction to the alleged potential arrival of refugees from Israel in the region; and protests in Bashkortostan related to the arrest of environmental activist Fail Alsynov. In all cases, the processes gained some media coverage, but in no way were they converted into compromises with the central government. The protest was simply reduced to nothing, restoring the conditional status quo.

In other words, communicating with Russian audiences by all available means is important, but the result of these communications can only be to persuade some Russians to refrain from taking action, as this does not require additional effort.

Instead, it is considered futile to encourage Russians to take action using communication tools. This is because the Russian audience is subjected to a significant deprivation of its capabilities and motivations, along with fear of the imperial coercive apparatus. According to the available data, even direct threats to life, such as natural disasters or even military operations and shelling, do not encourage the Russian Federation’s population to make demands on their political leadership. The main negative impact of social processes remains on the local level, according to the old tradition of “the tsar is good, the boyars are bad”.

Potential scenarios for the development of the situation in the Russian Federation in case of Ukraine’s significant military success

In March 2024, at the European think tank “Friends of Europe” (Brussels), Ukrainian experts, together with foreign colleagues, presented a report “Revenge, implosion or reform – three

scenarios for Russia after a defeat in Ukraine”¹⁴, which explored three potential scenarios for the development of the situation in the Russian Federation:

- 1) Consolidation of power in the Kremlin under Vladimir Putin, or around another leader who will take his place in the event of his death or resignation;
- 2) Lack of consolidation of power around the Kremlin due to conflicts between different groups and refusal to recognise the next leader or group of leaders;
- 3) The transformation of the Russian Federation in a way that would allow for a new socio-political arrangement between different parts of the elites.

The third scenario is recognised by experts as the least likely, but most desirable for Western political elites. It also corresponds to the hypothesis that, based on the above potential vulnerabilities to the stability of the Russian Federation’s state system, it can be concluded that among the three such vulnerabilities – “palace coup”, “popular discontent” and “cooling of relations between the centre and the subjects of the federation” – the vulnerabilities associated with centrifugal processes may have the greatest prospects.

However, it should be noted that such centrifugal processes will in no way be based on national, ethnic or religious differences between the social groups inhabiting the Russian Federation. The main nodes of potential conflict will continue to exist in the sphere of control over financial and material resources, as well as their distribution and accumulation. This is evidenced by the activities of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which has also tried to work with the regions of the Russian Federation, but without success.

Forecasts and prospects

Since the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the peoples and governments of the democratic world have consistently supported Ukraine’s independence, territorial integrity and right to self-defence. Political leaders promise to provide continued support to Ukraine, but they avoid talking about the end of the war and using the term “Russian defeat”.

According to available information, after Washington used the wording “inflict a strategic defeat on Russia”, the Kremlin expressed indignation at the use of “back channels” in the context of allegedly understanding this phrase as a pretext for a nuclear confrontation at the strategic level. Subsequently, the US administration made massive efforts to convince the Russian side that this wording was said “in a different context”.

Professor Martin van Creveld, an expert in military history and strategy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has written that Western countries “should be wary of the possibility

¹⁴ <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/revenge-implosion-or-reform-three-scenarios-for-russia-after-a-defeat-in-ukraine/>

of a Russian defeat”¹⁵. This is due to the potential consequences, including potential chaos and a stronger China, that could result from a Ukrainian military victory.

Tatiana Stanovaya, a Russian political analyst and expert at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, believes that Putin has launched an era of chaos with his full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and that this period of turmoil will culminate in a total conflict in which Vladimir Putin will lose his ability to mediate among his vassals and influencers. American historian and political scientist Alexander Motyl suggested that the potential disintegration of Russia should be taken seriously¹⁶. In his article, he quotes several well-known experts, such as Janusz Bugajski of The Jamestown Foundation, Washington Post columnist David Ignatius, and the same text by Tatiana Stanovaya.

Motyl emphasises that Russia’s prevailing feature today is its complete unpredictability, which could increase in the event of a collapse. Russia’s internal repressions will intensify, and its external aggression will increase. This trajectory will allow Putin to maintain control through individuals he considers personally loyal. However, as Stanovaya emphasises, the Prigozhin rebellion proves that this structure of Putin’s power will continue to be deeply unstable and impermanent.

These theses about the uncertain and unstable future of the Russian Federation ultimately contribute to a state of indecision in political action aimed at resolving the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Meanwhile, uncertainty cannot be reduced by handing over the initiative to an “uncertainty and certainty operator”, an actor that can increase the level of uncertainty at its discretion. By refusing to take proactive steps towards the Russian Federation, fearing unexpected results, the West is actually handing over full initiative to Vladimir Putin, who is the “operator of uncertainty”.

Instead, the future of the Russian Federation is shaped by inevitable factors that cannot be avoided. The risk of Russia’s collapse will remain regardless of the West’s action or inaction.

The concept of re-federalisation

The transformation of the Russian Federation from an imperial entity into a truly federal state (re-federalisation) has the potential to end the war, gradually restore Ukraine’s territorial integrity and provide guarantees against a repeat of the aggression. At the same time, this form of transformation of the Russian Federation will ensure that fears in the West of uncertainty and state collapse are levelled.

¹⁵ <https://www.welt.de/kultur/plus243174875/Ukraine-Krieg-Warum-wir-Angst-vor-Putins-Niederlage-haben-sollten.html>

¹⁶ <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4149633-what-if-russia-literally-splits-apart/>

Re-federalisation should increase the ability of the federal subjects to effectively protect their interests and rights through both active and passive ways. This is in contrast to the so-called “vertical of power” generated by the Kremlin, regardless of who holds the office of President of the Russian Federation.

Re-federalisation will ensure that the control over socio-economic processes within the constituent entities of the Russian Federation is maintained. This goal is in the West’s interest to prevent the disintegration of the Russian Federation. The only viable approach to achieving this is for the constituent entities of the Russian Federation to become decision-making entities that truly represent their populations. This implies moving beyond the role of simply executing directives from the central government.

To achieve this goal, Western elites must abandon their “policy of inaction”. Paradoxically, their unwillingness to see Russia disintegrate as a result of their actions could lead to both a strategic defeat by the Russian Federation and to the further disintegration of the Russian Federation in the medium term, after Vladimir Putin’s death. Thus, the West is actually exposed to the danger of what it fears most.

A compromise solution to achieve the goals of both sides is **a transformation of the Russian Federation** that, on the one hand, will ensure the liberation of Ukraine and guarantees of non-recurrence of aggression, and, on the other hand, will calm the fear of uncertainty that demotivates Western political elites to make the necessary decisions by preventing the disintegration of the federation into small national (feudal) entities.

At the same time, such a transformation should include the maximum weakening of the federal centre and the increase of the subjectivity of the regions (subjects of the federation), in the context of the previous versions of the Russian Constitution, which was, in fact, completely distorted during the period of Vladimir Putin’s rule. The levelling of the single vertical of power, with the emergence of new centres of power in the regions, will ensure that socio-economic processes in the Russian Federation’s constituent entities remain manageable, which is desirable for the West. At the same time, it will reduce the ability of the federal centre of the Russian Federation to make and implement decisions on aggressive actions against Ukraine or other states. This could be achieved through a potential reformatting of the Russian Federation Senate, the upper house of parliament, which consists of regional representatives and gives the Russian Federation president the right to use armed forces outside the country.

This can be achieved through a set of measures in two key areas:

- 1) In-depth study of regional economic, socio-political and constitutional and legal aspects of the Russian Federation’s regions to create a desired model of influence on the Russian regional elites in order to weaken the Kremlin and strengthen the influence of the Russian Federation’s subjects;

- 2) Communicating with representatives of Western political elites to engage them in indirect influence on the Russian Federation and establishing separate contacts with representatives of the elites.

Conclusions

The stability of the Russian Federation's state system is ensured by two main aspects of Russian society, which are as follows. Firstly, a rigidly constructed and long-established apparatus of state coercion based on powerful national security and law enforcement agencies. Secondly, the total deprivation of the population from the political life of the country and the inability of institutional influence on the authorities.

In this regard, any subjective position that can be converted into trends in changing the status quo (centrifugal or centripetal) can be generated exclusively by the behaviour of individuals who have some control over resources and their distribution, and can influence decision-making processes.

At the same time, the political and financial elites of the federal centre exist in conditions of full loyalty to Vladimir Putin and the system he created, as they consider themselves part of this system. Hence, it can be concluded that the only ones who can non-publicly take steps of disloyalty to the government are representatives of the political, financial and business elites of the regions of the Russian Federation. In particular, those whose property complexes have already become or may become objects of nationalisation, as well as representatives of the state apparatus (proteges) associated with them.

It should be noted that, even under optimal conditions of the situation in the Russian Federation, which would facilitate the development of social and political movements advocating for the independence of the regions from Moscow and the end of the war, the real decisions will be made by persons in the legislative and executive bodies of the regions who demonstrate publicly their full loyalty to Putin. Therefore, they should be the priority for the audience to study and communicate with.

At the same time, it is important to note that, while there is a certain degree of expert knowledge of the activities of opposition groups, the Ukrainian side does not have any objective information about a large stratum of "middle" elites in the regions who are not "federal level oligarchs".

A cynical financial view of improving the welfare of these elites, in case they refuse to be loyal to Putin, may become the basis for developing non-public trilateral relations with their representatives, with the obligatory involvement of representatives of Western partners, since Ukraine's representatives have nothing to offer Russian regional elites. They can only mediate with Western society.

Thus, based on the above, it can be concluded that the Russian Federation's state system has a sufficient margin of stability even in critical moments of non-standard situations such as Prigozhin's rebellion or the operation in the Kursk region.

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