

POLITICAL DISSIDENTS IN PUTIN'S RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

Political Dissidents in Putin's Russia. (May 2013)

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When it comes to punishing opponents of the present-day regime, Soviet traditions remain alive and well. So that Russia's attempt at democracy can be better understood, I will discuss aspects of the Soviet government dating back to WWII. Russia can only be understood in the context of the past. I study the government branches to emphasize the power of the president. Russia's electoral and party systems are mentioned to understand Russia's lack of plurality and ongoing efforts to stifle dissident voices. Those who publically endorse ideas against the regime risk death. The journalist, Anna Politkovskaya, publically opposed Putin and his involvement in Chechnya was shot at her apartment. Paul Klebnikov dedicated his life to reporting and researching Russian business affairs. His vast knowledge stood as a threat to Putin, and he too was murdered. These two individuals stood for truth and transparency in Russian society. Those who threaten the legitimacy of Putin's government are silenced. This paper examines how political dissidents reflect how Putin's role as Russia's executive authority singularly threatens to co-opt Russia's fledgling democracy, transitioning the country into a new era of authoritarianism.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While the Soviet Union has disbanded, the Russian Federation remains the largest country in the world in terms of area, stretching across eleven different time zones and two continents. The Russian Federation has a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and still boasts one of the world's most technically advanced and powerful militaries in the world. Russia's giant energy deposits have helped create one of the world's largest economies and have contributed to balancing Russia's prominence in the European ring of affairs. Russia's stability has a direct impact on the world's stability. Russian government and politics are not just relevant to Russians alone, but the "sleeping giant" is of direct importance to international security and the global economy.

Regime Type

Russia has traded Communism for an "Illiberal Democracy" (Zakaria, 99). The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics experienced "Stalinism" from 1927 to 1953. Stalinism is characterized by an enormous and elaborate bureaucratic governing structure, a state-controlled economy, a persistent secret police, and a cult surrounding a "heroic" public figure that behaves as a despotic supreme leader spewing arbitrary rule (McCauley 1992). The single socialist state held elections that looked very similar to a democratic institution on paper, but their ballots had one name written on them. Elections were a way to reaffirm allegiance and trust in the Soviet government. All Soviet decisions originated in Moscow, be they policy or personnel. During this period, opposition to Stalin's government was not tolerated. A rigid vertical power structure pervaded

the Communist Party. Fear saturated the Soviet people, resulting in a cynical, distrustful society. Deviation from Soviet norms could result in arrest, imprisonment in the Gulag, or execution. Stalin was indeed a despotic leader with no regard for human life, but he did provide lasting consequences during his leadership. As the General Secretary of the Soviet Union, he created a constitution, obtained the USSR's membership in the League of Nations, and thwarted Hitler's Germany.

Following the death of Stalin, the Communist Party in the Soviet Union underwent many degrees of change. Nikita Khrushchev denounced the crimes committed under Stalin's rule, beginning a new period of Communism. De-Stalinization distanced the Soviet state from using terror as a form of governing, bringing positive change to the citizens' lives, although what replaced the Gulag were psychiatric prisons. The transfer of power from Khrushchev to Brezhnev was relatively peaceful and also resulted in a period of relative stability for the Soviet Union. Post-Stalinism was able to create greater upward mobility for its citizens by meeting more of their needs. However, while this government made huge strides in education, health, and housing; their achievements paled in comparison to the advances by their Western neighbors.

After Konstantin Chernenko passed away in March 1985, the last executive authority, of the Soviet Union was selected, Mikhail Gorbachev. This new leader brought a completely different policy agenda. He hoped to bring attention to special interests groups and also demanded more social justice. He established the Glasnost policy which intended to institute a more transparent government that would reduce the corruption occurring at all levels of the Communist Party. Gorbachev believed that if the public was more informed, they would be more committed to the goals of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the program Perestroika was implemented to reconstruct the country's political and economic structure. These changes were considered dramatic and

risky at the time of their creation, but helped to breathe human life back into Soviet society and create an environment where progress could be generated. These radical reforms allowed citizens to have a choice in candidates and also helped strengthened the independence of judges.

The biggest change to the Soviet Union's political system came from the collapse of the centrally planned economy. As the government printed more money and raised salaries to combat inflation, growth staggered and instability increased (White 2013). While the economy spiraled, so did the Soviet Union. The country systemically dissolved beginning with the economy, followed by a disillusioned social and political sphere. The Soviet people became cynical and no longer accepted their current government. Many demanded a new liberal government, while others fought to revert to the traditional Soviet ways. Gorbachev could not create a compromise between these two demands. The Soviet Union officially unraveled on December 25, 1991 when Gorbachev resigned from his position as the General Secretary. The demise came as a complete shock, despite the unstable factors brewing in the depths of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

The new Russian Federation is considered an Illiberal Democracy today and uses the constitution created under Boris Yeltsin in 1993, though some changes have been made. Since Putin's election in 2000, Russia is moving further and further away from a traditional democratic model. Vladimir Putin's campaign based on the Chechen War was deliberately provoked so that Yeltsin's successor might win the election. Putin was previously a member of the Soviet Union's KGB. His previous membership in this organization challenges his commitment to democracy. After Putin was elected in 2000, he immediately began by creating eight Federal Districts, so that he could better exert federal authority. Putin has reverted to Soviet central-control and aspects of Stalinism. Any opponents to his rule risk persecution, arrest and possible murder by thugs or

henchmen. He does not care how high profile his threats are; his victims have included the previously richest man in Russia, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, and the journalist, Anna Politkovskaya. He has even managed to change the constitution, so he could remain the most powerful leader in Russia. He is now essentially serving his fourth term as the leader of Russia. In 2008, Dmitry Medvedev served his first and only term as president and Putin made the Prime Minister the more powerful position during that period, so that he could maintain executive control. Russia can still be called an Illiberal Democracy, but the nation is dangerously close to being defined as an authoritarian regime under the hand of Putin. Mikhail Gorbachev has become a harsh critic of the current regime saying, "We have everything – a parliament, courts, a president, a prime minister and so on. But it's more of an imitation" (Elder). The Putinist system possesses unpredictable rules with predetermined outcomes, a preeminent political party, a disproportionately powerful presidency, and controlled mass media (White 2013). Parties remain very weak with elections being very controlled, due to the state's control of the media and the massive amount of federal funds invested into the favored candidate of the government. Russia has become increasingly centrally controlled. The country continues to be run in a more and more top-down fashion with an emphasis on the executive, causing the parliament to lose more and more of its few powers. The future of Russia currently resides in the hands of Vladimir Putin, but the public is yearning for freedom and transparency through protest.

Distribution of Power within Russia

Russia is a federal state now composed of 83 administrative units comprised of 21 republics, 46 oblasts, 9 krais, 2 federal cities, and 5 autonomous okrugs. These different categories were established to define the different powers and freedoms of varying federal subjects. There were 89 administrative units in the 1993 constitution, but some federal subjects merged, resulting in

83 units by 2008. Additionally, these 83 units are grouped into eight federal districts, allowing for more centralized control. These districts are designed carefully with this goal in mind. These regions have presidentially appointed leaders and their own provincial capital.

The constitution clearly defines powers reserved for the federal government and describes regional issues as joint responsibilities between federal and regional powers. Russia previously directly elected their local leaders. In 2004, President Putin decided to revoke the people's power to elect their governors. Governors were then nominated by the president and confirmed by the legislature. But in December 2011, President Dmitri Medvedev proposed three bills to the Duma that would again allow the governors to be directly elected. These bills passed in April 2012. But days after Putin's inauguration, he reversed this bill, only allowing direct elections to take place in four regions – Amur, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Novgorod. The regions restricted from participating in elections are the areas where the United Russia Party is most vulnerable. These areas have seen opposing parties' victories at the mayoral level. This reversal shows Putin's emphasis on retaining power even at the most local level.

The United Russia party has been the main instrument allowing Russia to recentralize its government (Kontizer and Wegren 2006). During the Yeltsin years, some regional political systems were extremely independent. Some areas existed as near sovereign states. This administration could not exert federal power over regional governments since they had no dominant party, much less parties. Realizing this weakness, the two parties Unity and Fatherland-All Russia merged to form United Russia in the 1999 election. Since Yeltsin left office in 1999, the Russian government has aggressively pursued a more centralized government. Regional leaders quickly realized the advantages of sharing the same party as President Putin. Consequently, many regional executives made their allegiance to United Russia. This movement

eliminated much competition in elections and the president was also able to push almost any legislation through the legislature. As Cameron Ross notes, “the president’s [Putin] attempts to reign in the power of the region and to reassert what he calls the ‘power vertical’ have made a mockery of the principles of federalism” (2004, 155). Although, Russia calls itself federalist in its constitution, it now operates more like a unitary government.

Overview of Governing Institutions and Their Electoral Institutions

The 1993 Constitution of the Russian Federation outlines a strong executive and a weak legislature. The Executive branch has a semi-presidential system. The president nominates the highest state officials including the prime minister, who must also be approved by the Duma. The prime minister serves a more administrative role, enforcing public policy and nominating members to the executive cabinet. The president holds an insurmountable amount of power in the Russian government. A Russian president may pass decrees without the consent of the Duma. He may also veto laws proposed by the legislature. The president also fills the positions Head of Armed Forces and Head of the Security Council. The president determines basic domestic and foreign policy. In certain situations, the president may dissolve the State Duma and the Federal Assembly. If the Duma expresses a vote of no confidence or rejects the proposed prime minister three times the Duma can be disbanded by the president. A new president is elected every six years, but prior to Putin changing the constitution in December 2008, the president held a four year term. A Russian president must obtain a majority of the votes in an election. If this requirement is not met, a run-off will take place three weeks later between the two front-running candidates. There are stringent requirements regulating who can become a presidential nominee. A candidate’s party must have a minimum of 50,000 registered members, at least 500 of its members in more than half of the 83 regions of the Federation and no less than 250 members in

the remaining regional branches. This makes it very difficult for small parties to enter a presidential candidate.

The Russian Federation has a bicameral legislature composed of a lower house, the State Duma, and an upper house, the Federation Council. The Duma is a 450 seat house with its members addressed as deputies. This is the more powerful house in the legislature, since all bills must be considered by the Duma, even those created in the upper house. Once a bill is passed by a majority vote of the Duma, the proposed law is then sent to the Federation Council. If the Council rejects the draft law, a meeting may be set up between the two houses to see if a compromise can be reached. Also, the Duma may express a vote of no confidence by a majority of the house, but the president may completely disregard this vote. The Russian Duma is elected through a proportional representation system. There is a 7% threshold for representation, one of the highest in Europe. This threshold used to be 5%, but Putin raised this percentage in December 2008. Parties competing for seats have decreased from eleven in the 2007 election, to seven in the 2011 election. This is primarily because half the seats used to be elected through proportional representation and the other half through single seat constituencies. President Putin claimed to change this system, also in December 2008, to a pure proportional representation system, so other parties could consolidate, since all deputies had to be chosen from the party list.

The Federation Council is comprised of 166 members referred to as senators. Two senators represent each of the 83 federal subjects. One of the senators is elected by the provincial legislature and the other is nominated by the provincial governor and is confirmed by the provincial legislature. There is no nationally set term for members of the Federation Council. Regional bodies determine their representatives' term. This council is supposed to collaborate with the state duma, completing and voting on draft laws. The Federation Council also has

exclusive powers. This body can move to impeach the president, decide if Russia should place its military outside state borders, and declare a presidential election if necessary.

The Judicial Branch consists of three different types of courts: courts of general jurisdiction, arbitrage courts, and the Constitutional Courts. The courts of general jurisdiction include the Supreme Court, regional level courts, district level courts, and justices of the peace. The municipal level courts that serve a city or a region, hear near all civil and criminal cases.

Regional courts are often subject to political pressure and engage in widespread corruptions. The Supreme Court receives lower trial courts cases. Arbitration courts hear property and commercial disputes involving firms. Laws and regulations in this court are constantly changing and are also overlapping, making decisions more complex. The highest court that handles economic disputes is the High Court of Arbitration. The Constitutional Court consists of 19 judges, one being the chairman and another being the deputy chairman. The judges are all appointed by the president and confirmed by the Federation Council. This court rules if laws and presidential decrees are constitutional. This court cannot examine cases on its own initiative. The Russian Judiciary is relatively weak, allowing for a more vertical government.

Overview of the Russian Political Party System

Russia has a multi-party system made up of seven main parties. The largest and by far most powerful party is Putin's United Russia Party. Three other main parties stray far behind, but nonetheless do hold seats in the current Duma elected in 2011: The Communist Party of the Russian Federation, A Just Russia, and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia. The Communist Party is the main opposition to United Russia, though trailing far behind. A Just Russia is a fake opposition party taking a democratic socialist stance. The Liberal Democratic Party is a

xenophobic Russian nationalist group. The other parties, Right Cause, Yabloko, and Patriots of Russia, did not obtain enough votes in the 2011 election to cross the 7% threshold. Competition in Russian elections seems to be more constrained than eliminated. The current party system supports this idea. Parties, other than United Russia, are allowed small victories, but rules and electoral laws ensure any opposing party can never develop into a real threat. Without wealthy sponsors or significant financial support from the government, many parties might find it difficult to attract enough members to be represented in government (White and Webb 2007). This lack of funding makes it difficult to have any air time on the television, which is the primary form of campaigning, due to Russia's large size. Additionally, the media favors United Russia during elections and supports the ruling government by replaying its achievements, even if they are few at the moment. Putin also has Russian business devoted to his party. The president early on rewarded his supporters in the business arena and destroyed those that would not follow him, resulting in an elite that is in complete support of him. Russia's current party system allows others parties to form opposing campaigns, creating the illusion of choice and democracy. These constraints probably are enough to secure his victory without miscounting votes. In the event he did fail to obtain enough votes to maintain his position, projecting false results would not be below this government.

Conclusion

The Russian political system has transformed significantly since being under a communist regime. Russian federalism since 2000 has entered a new phase, defined by the recentralization of power to the federal level and the rise of Putin's party, United Russia. Russia's party system and regional governments may continue to get weaker if the federal power continues to grow. An overshadowing central government is detrimental to the process of democracy and may lead to

an authoritarian state. As the executive authority coopts that of the judicial and legislative branches, the Russian government becomes less responsive and accountable to the interest of the people. While Russian elections meet the standards of democratic practice, fraud and unfair suppression of political competition have turned elections into farcical exercises (Fish 2005).

CHAPTER II

ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA

Politkovskaya's Background

One of the key figures to challenge Putin's authoritarian regime was Anna Politkovskaya. She was one of Russia's most intelligent and dedicated citizens, and one of the world's most courageous journalists. She was born in 1958 in New York City, where her parents were serving their role as Soviet diplomats in the United Nations. It is important to remember she had American citizenship and could have left Russia at anytime. She had many opportunities to stay in America after she received one of her many prizes and awards. Being a successful journalist, she could have accepted a job at a think tank or travelled to college campuses while sharing her stories with astonished students. She could have escaped Russia's corruption and violence and continued her quest for the advancement of human rights in protection abroad. Anna's family and friends urged her to leave the country, for officials in all levels of the Russian government had threatened her life repeatedly. But she did not leave Russia. She saw how America and Europe supported Putin and recognized, "those in Russia who hope for help from the West need finally to recognize that winning back our democratic freedoms is up to us" (Politkovskaya, xi). She spent her professional career reporting the atrocities of the Chechen War and the social problems plaguing Russian society. Ideologues on both sides of the spectrum repulsed her. What interested her were human stories. She reminded Russians if none were willing to stand up for their basic freedoms and rights, then they will continue to diminish until they completely disappear. Anna acted as a moral conscience of society by continually exposing what others would not dare to, completely committed to the truth. In her own words, Politkovskaya

emphasized: “I have merely reported what I have witnessed, no more than that” (Politkovskaya, 2006, Washington Post). As a journalist she held both politicians and political institutions accountable, despite the high risk of reporting the Russian government’s abuses in Chechnya. Unfortunately, her boldness and commitment to the truth caused her life to be cut prematurely by those who wanted to silence her reports. On October 7th 2006, Anna Politkovskaya was shot dead in broad daylight in the elevator of her apartment block. At the time, she was close to publishing a detailed story exhibiting the torture practices routinely executed by Chechen security forces supported by Russia. The content of this nearly completed report will probably never be recovered. After her murder, police immediately confiscated her journal, computer hard drive and photographs of two Chechen security force members she would accuse of torture. Vladimir Putin notoriously remarked three days following her murder: “Anna Politkovskaya’s political influence was quite insignificant inside Russia. I believe her murder brought more damage to the Russian authorities than her publications ever did” (Kremlin Archives). Vladimir Putin and his political allies found themselves often criticized in Politkovskaya’s publications, so Putin’s disturbing response to the homicide can be explained through his personal chagrin toward the assassinated reporter.

State of Russian Journalism

Journalism is a dangerous career in Russia. 43 journalists have perished since Putin has come to office in 2000 (Preston). Journalists are harassed, beaten, and threatened under Putin’s administration. “The Russian state under Putin has shown no interest in protecting journalism as a group: This includes silent approval of the growing number of lawsuits against journalist, continued support of criminal punishment for libel, the passing of new laws that make incriminating journalist easier (the laws on extremism and on terrorism), and lack of enthusiasm

for solving the crimes committed against journalists” (Roudakova, 425). The murder of Anna Politkovskaya marked a turning point in Russian journalism. “It’s obvious after the Politkovskaya murder that no one is immune” (Gumbel, 25). Reporter’s bloodshed, year after year, coupled with scanty investigations, rarely producing any conclusion. Impunity is common in Russia, and the lack of justice and fear implemented under these pretenses discourages the younger population from filling risky journalist positions. Carefully chosen assassinations are enough to guarantee fear in the majority of Russian citizens. Journalists are the eyes and ears of society and as they disappear, society is stripped of their possibility to see and hear. Journalists, like Anna Politkovskaya, held their government accountable and provided some form of transparency to the people. Russian reporters do not only find themselves imperiled in a war zone, but also in their homes. Nowhere is safe if a journalist is killed in his or her home after publically reporting a story deviating from the government sponsored media

Journalists who do not completely cooperate with the government are blamed for supporting corruption, bribery, dishonesty, and are designated outcasts of Russian society. Politkovskaya stated, “My life can be difficult; more often, humiliating. I am not after all, that young at 47 to keep encountering rejection and having own pariah status constantly rubbed in my face” (Politkovskaya, 2006, *The Guardian*). The Kremlin divides journalists into two groups, those who are with us and those who are against us. If a journalist is on [the Kremlin’s] side, he or she will get awards, respect, perhaps be invited to become a deputy in the Duma” (Politkovskaya, 2006, *Washington Post*). Those who are willing to defect are willing to accept the very possible fatal consequences of their chosen profession for they see a better and viable future for Russian citizens, available only through the rejection of despotism and brutality. They realize the demand for change must emerge from the Russian people. For change to occur truth needs to emanate.

Courageous individuals describe the life surrounding the Russian people to repel the media that is plagued with bias ideology.

The Chechen War

Anna Politkovskaya spent much of her life writing about injustice and for many years reported about the Chechnya Wars, managing to travel there thirty-nine times. In these stories, she reported scenes of rape, massacre, kidnapping, and bombing the blameless. This information displayed the atrocities her government practiced and supported. The first campaign of the Chechen War occurred under President Boris Yeltsin ending in 1996, closing with 15,000 Russian militia deaths and at least 100,000 civilians dead. The first stage of the War ended primarily because of the Russian public's outrage at the cost, pointlessness, and clear barbarism occurring in the War zone. The press' coverage caused the war to end. Putin took note of the free press and informed the public's power to change the direction of the government and tighten control on the media in the second stage of the war. Russian authorities went to great lengths to ensure there were no reporters in the war zone. Those reporters who went in the combat zone without proper documents risked retribution for their "anti-Russian" coverage. The Second Chechen War began in the summer of 1999 under the new Putin leadership with intentions to finish the war properly. Politkovskaya wrote two books on the Chechnya Wars and was held in high regard by the Chechen people. Few Russian journalists had the courage to report the stories with objectivity. She attempted to check the government's media coverage by presenting the unreported events to the public.

Nord-Ost Theatre Crisis

In October 2002, Chechen separatists, under the leadership of Shamil Basaev, appropriated the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow during a performance of the musical, *Nord-Ost*. During the siege, they took 912 people hostage. The terrorists threatened to kill every theatergoer in Dubrovka, if the Russian government did not withdraw their military from Chechnya. Politkovskaya's prominent reputation among the Chechens resulted in her designation as a negotiator during this crisis. No agreement was immediately reached and the Russian government officials hastily concluded no negotiation would be possible. After merely two and a half days, president Putin approved the use of a still unidentified gas to be released by Russian special task forces in the theatre. Thirty-three terrorists were killed, along with at least 130 hostages. Only 5 of the 130 civilians were murdered directly by the terrorists, all others passed away breathing the unknown gas (Borogan, 2012).

When the gas was released, there was no medical assistance on site, and the government did not identify the poisonous gas used in the attack, so medical teams could not save many citizens. Also, all the terrorists were shot regardless of whether they had already died or remained alive. There is confusion as to why the terrorists were not simply arrested if they were still alive since under the law they are to be considered innocent until proven guilty. Many are suspicious that these terrorists might have testified the hostages could have been released. The purpose of this special task assault was to exhibit strength with no focus on saving the hostages, their own citizens, lives. After Anna Politkovskaya attempted to negotiate with the terrorists, Alexander Voloshin, the head of the presidential administration, demanded she have no more contact with the terrorist (Politkovskaya, 2007, 54). Anna had "come to the inescapable conclusion that this terrorist act helped to reinforce anti-Chechen hysteria, to prolong the war in Chechnya, and to

maintain the president's high approval rating" (Politkovskaya, 2007, 54). Politkovskaya believed the terrorists had no real intentions of bombing Dubrovka Theater and the government did not have any strong concern for the Russian citizens held hostage, due to the evident disorganization and impulsive nature of the siege (Politkovskaya, 2007, 53). When it was clear an agreement could be reached, the Russian government immediately arranged a plan of assault.

Vladimir Putin used this hostage crisis to convince the Deputies in the Duma to pass extensive, specific new restrictions on the media, constraining the material that can be recounted and the methods used to report. After the siege, Putin, in an interview with the Washington Post, claimed, "These people did not die as a result of that gas, because the gas was harmless. It was harmless, and we can say that in the course of the operation not a single hostage was harmed [by the gas]" (Politkovskaya, 2007, 53). Ten years have passed since this incident, and still no commission has been formed to investigate the government's actions during the Nord-Ost Crisis. Putin aims to constrain the Russian media, not only to dupe his own people, but to deceive the rest of the world. In October 2012, the Duma passed new amendments to broaden the definition of treason (Astrasheuskaya, 2012). These new laws consider anyone sharing information with foreign organizations, even in a consulting capacity, a spy, furthering Putin's chokehold on independent information. These amendments will surely stifle government opposition and foreign influence.

Beslan Crisis

On the morning of September 1st 2004, a group of terrorists seized School Number One in the North Ossetian town of Beslan. The terrorists planned their attack on Knowledge Day, when the community consisting of children, teachers, and parents are celebrating the first day of school.

The siege began with the terrorists surrounding the school and forcing all 1127 hostages into the school's cramped gym (Ó Tuathail, 4). The government media reported only 354 hostages. This extreme understatement enraged the terrorists, consequently they forced the children on a "hunger strike," without food or water. The first day of the Beslan crisis resulted in three terrorists and at least thirty hostage deaths. On the second day, Ruslan Aushev mediated the release of 26 victims, 11 women and 15 children. Without any more advances in reconciliation, the third day of the crisis commenced with an unexplained explosion which created a hole in the roof of the gymnasium with another explosion following in quick succession, causing the roof to cave in, leaving many hostages in a line of fire. Some hostages ran when the Special Forces stormed the gymnasium, but many could not move because their bodies were too weak from the "hunger strike." Thermobaric weapons, used to create a longer explosion resulting in more casualties, and tanks were firing rounds directly at School Number 1. After a considerable amount of time passed, it was finally established that 334 hostages perished in the school, 188 of the casualties were children. More than 600 were injured; over half of them were children (Ó Tuathail,4).

The Russian government tried its best to ensure complete control of the media at the Beslan crisis. Anna Politkovskaya was forcefully prevented from traveling to Beslan. She was twice refused to board her flight. When she finally secured a seat on her flight, she was poisoned and fell into a coma. The media downplayed the crisis by not only inaccurately reporting the number of hostages, but also forcing the main Russian television stations to continue their normal broadcasts, while CNN and the BCC provided live coverage (Petrovskaya, 2004).

Misinformation resulted in the children undergoing a hunger strike and widespread local frustration, intensified by a huge civilian death toll. "Residents of Beslan attacked state television

reporters because their lying, by now habitual in the Putin era, had started costing the lives of women and children they knew” (Politkovskaya, 2007, 179).

Conclusion

The Anna Politkovskaya’s commitment to the truth in Chechnya never wavered under the extreme scrutiny of the Putin regime. Her commitment stemmed not only from her concern for human rights, but primarily from her passion for Russia. She wanted her granddaughter to experience a better Russia. She believed prosperity could only be attained through truth and change and felt as a journalist she could provide Russia with some of these truths. The public must demand accountability for prosecuting the perpetrators and acknowledge the government role in persecuting its journalists if citizens want Russia to achieve greatness. Politkovskaya’s noble commitment to the Russian people did not go unpunished, as she was murdered at her apartment. She perished under the hands of a negligent regime that allows its journalists to be in harm’s way. Her murder exhibits Russia’s democratic system’s negative trajectory. Civil society will continue to suffer without freedom of speech due to current draconian government laws and behavior. Politkovskaya was a truth seeker that dispersed her findings among those who would listen, and nothing is more dangerous in Russia today.

CHAPTER III

PAUL KLEBNIKOV

Paul Klebnikov was another journalist killed in Russia for his activist publications. He grew up in East Side Manhattan, son of two Russian émigré families. His childhood apartment was decorated in gilded Russian Orthodox icons and his family exclusively spoke the Russian language. The family apartment constantly hosted parties, “where one person would be playing Tchaikovsky on the piano, drinking vodka, and in the next room there were people arguing ferociously about art, and everyone was eating blini” (Pohl, 3). Klebnikov’s childhood ingrained a love for all that was Russian.

He chose to concentrate on Russia in his later studies, obtaining a doctorate degree in Russian-History at the London School of Economics (Granville, 448). After completing his dissertation, he began researching for *Forbes* in their New York office. He regularly travelled to Russia and was eventually promoted to the founding editor of *Forbes Russia*. Through his work, he believed he could be a part of the Russia’s transition from a gangster country to a civilized country. Despite Russia’s violent and turbulent history, he felt the nation could move forward during its post-communist period, evolving into a modern nation that would foster a stronger civil society and become a major global player in world politics and technology (Forbes). He imagined Russia adopting liberalism while maintaining and celebrating the country’s unique cultural characteristics. He believed Russia would come to the forefront of the world, not by military strength, but through innovation and a vibrant economy (Kashulinsky). Russian brains and inventiveness would be tantamount to Russia’s progress. Klebnikov thus researched and reported on corrupt oligarchs tirelessly, for he believed they discouraged Russian creativity and

essentially stood in the way of Russia's fragile progression to a dynamic economy rooted in innovation.

The Oligarch Investigation

Klebnikov came to Russia to conduct an economic investigation, to find out the pervasiveness of criminal business activities. The political and business elites' lack of social responsibility in post-communist Russia continually disappointed him, but he believed the situation could be improved through investigations made public (ProjectKlebnikov.org). He analyzed Russia's big businesses that were controlled by Russian oligarchs at the time. The outright thievery and corruption that accompanied Russia's transition to capitalism horrified Klebnikov (Pohl, 4). The journalist particularly zeroed in on Boris Berezovsky, an oligarch who became rich through a car-dealership business, in his article that eventually became an expose titled, "Godfather of the Kremlin." This publication suggested Berezovsky was involved in murders and additionally used other violent tactics to conduct his business, portraying him as a ruthless tycoon whose profits are only increased with each day Russia continues to revel in economic abyss. Klebnikov claimed "no man stood closer to all three authorities at once: crime, commerce, and government" (Klebnikov, 2000). After this article ran, Berezovsky received many death threats.

Additionally he published an article in *Forbes Russia* listing the 100 richest Russians, adding that Moscow was home to more billionaires than any other city in the world at thirty-six (Klebnikov, 2004). Many of these wealthy Russians could have done without the publicity. In Russian society, it is well understood great fortunes are obtained through criminal practices, especially at the hands of oligarchs. Since wealth is associated with criminal activity, oligarchs prefer to keep their affluence quiet. Klebnikov's report showed the enormous wealth and power

of the tiny Russian elite that controls an appalling portion of Russia's GDP. Many of the top one hundred richest Russians enjoyed their wealth in shadows prior to Klebnikov's article. When the list was published, the exorbitantly wealthy were suddenly thrown into the spotlight of Russian society. This report may have inspired a shy billionaire to seek revenge, or more pragmatically put an end to this flow of information. An investigation with this kind of classified detailed information may have caused not only a billionaire to fear he knew too much, but also the Kremlin.

Murder

Klebnikov began working on a new project investigating a complex money laundering scheme involving Chechen reconstruction projects, tracing itself back to the heart of the Kremlin through the FSB, the former KGB, and a web of organized crime. (Perri, 74). The journalist had a habit of working late in the Moscow Forbes office and the night of his murder was no exception. On July 9th, 2004, he left his office at 10pm and was met by a car firing rounds of shots, four of which hit Klebnikov (Pohl). He survived until he arrived at the hospital, but he was loaded into a broken elevator and there his time ran out (projectklebnikov.com). He passed away at the young age of forty-one.

A trial was slow to form. Only with immense pressure from the American embassy did an investigation of Klebnikov's murder convene. The government claimed their investigation led them to believe the murder was the result of Chechen terrorists (Satter). Few believe this claim and no steps have been taken in Putin's Russia to further investigate this incident, further manifesting Russia's sham of a judicial process. Today Klebnikov's murderers still walk free. Impunity in violent crimes against journalists has destroyed Russia's freedom of press by

instilling self-censorship. Russian's rank of journalists who are willing to uncover and divulge corruption, organized crime, and human rights' abuses are dramatically shrinking. Enemies of free press have been very effective in curbing journalists' curiosity through a regular practice of bloodshed. Every Russian journalist knows that studying a sensitive story can result in their death, therefore much of the crime committed by government officials and wealthy businessman go unreported. When it comes to slaying journalists, theories only seem to emerge in the investigation of their murders, never any serious analyses uncovering these murders. This can be amounted to the fact that the law enforcement is under the authority of the very people who find independent reporting and free press most deplorable.

Putin

Since Putin has taken office in 2000, investigative journalists have been murdered with obscene regularity. Russia is the third-deadliest country in the world for reporters and the ninth worst in solving crimes committed against these journalists (Ognianova). Most of the journalist killings are thought to be responses to publicized reports on organized crime, government corruption or Putin's involvement in the Chechen War. When Paul Klebnikov was murdered in Moscow, few were persuaded when the murder was blamed on Chechen terrorists (Bremmer, 4). His death probably had more to do with the Kremlin intending to re-arrange property ownership of Russia's natural resources (Lavelle, 2). It was one of the final steps in the seizing of the giant oil company, Yukos. Oligarchs have free reign in who they want to silence under the rules of the Putin's regime. Putin and Medvedev have made futile efforts to crack down on the murder of journalists. They are not taking any steps towards human rights or freedom of speech by failing to organize a real investigation and trial. Russia does not have an authentic rule of law, constituted by just rendering and enforcement of the law, but rather it has Putin's dictatorship of

law. To keep law arbitrary, Putin concludes he must continue to curtail freedom of speech. When questioned about the dwindling freedom of the media, Putin responded by saying, “Russia has never had a free media, so I don’t know what I am supposed to be impeding” (Jenkins).

When taking office in 2000, Putin immediately made an effort to reign in the powerful groups in Russia, both in government and business. Putin attacked the oligarchs’ at the beginning of his reign so that business would become more obedient to the state. Under Yeltsin, business followed its own interests, even when the oligarch’s decisions were at odds with Russian foreign policy. Putin managed to gain control of the large businesses within Russia, restoring state control of key industrial sectors, strategic assets. He began his consolidation of control by first going after the dominant media in Russia, national television stations. The oligarch, Vladimir Gusinsky, who built and owned the Media-Most empire, experienced Putin’s ruthlessness first. His independent television station was taken over hostilely by two government raids and then turned into the state-controlled television station, *Gazprom*. Putin also arrested Gusinsky who immediately fled into exile when the opportunity arose. Gusinsky’s station was a fierce opponent of Putin during the 2000 election, thus he eliminated his sharpest critic. By controlling the primary media, Putin was able to greatly reduce the political influence of the oligarchs, while dramatically increasing his own popularity. Gusinsky is now in exile along with Berezovsky, who was also forced to surrender his news outlet, ORT, because of unfair politicized lawsuits (Duncan 10). The state successfully monopolized the supply of available information to Russian citizens. Most news now glorifies Putin and the government.

Putin has been able to increase state control and renationalize the Russian economy through decreased media freedom. Klebnikov’s murder is speculated to be an integral piece towards the state’s takeover of Yukos, Mikhail Khordovsky’s huge oil company. It should be noted that

Khordovsky vehemently opposed Putin and threatened to run against him in the then upcoming presidential election. His company, Yukos, fell victim to contrived crippling tax demands, bringing the company into a state of bankruptcy. The bankruptcy of Yukos facilitated the creation of a state-owned oil extracting company, in line with the economic strategies of Putin, leading many to believe Putin was in control of these events (Duncan, 11). The Yukos affair signaled the Kremlin's commitment to asserting its authority over the business community. The journalist would have been able to possibly expose Putin's involvement in the affair through his incomparable knowledge of the Russian economy and oligarchs. It would have shown the selectiveness of Putin's moves against certain oligarchs to be uninspired by real crimes and corruption, but initiated to remove any threats to his power. In attacking a few oligarchs, he disciplines the rest, diminishing their ability to serve as a counterweight to Putin's autocratic forces. The same rule applies to journalist in Russia.

Democracy

Putin's ploys against the oligarchs and attempts to reassert state control over the media have not occurred without deteriorating relations with the West. The president's fight to restore the Kremlin's authority over the press, television, and big business indicates a clear reversal of liberalization. The West has become much more skeptical of Putin's tactics. Without real information in the Russian media, citizens are not able to hold their leaders accountable. The government now enjoys widespread support through media control, allowing the Kremlin to be highly resistant to domestic and international pressure. Any state that blatantly ignores the assassination of a reporter cannot pretend to call itself a democracy. A democracy is comprised

of three basic elements, rule of law, an independent judiciary, and a free media. When journalists are threatened, democracy is also threatened, for it is an essential pillar of a democratic state. The impunity that occurred in the death of Paul Klebnikov has only worsened since his murder. Russia has continued to recentralize under the despotic leadership of Vladimir Putin, further distancing the nation from a free media. The Kremlin has done little to improve the corruption and violence running rampant through organized crime and the government. Freedom of speech and assembly are universal rights that should be recognized in every government and culture.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Impunity in violent crimes against reporters has severely damaged Russia's record on media freedom and made President Putin's attempts to strengthen the rule of law appear feeble. It is often suspected that officials use the murder of journalists for their own purposes, by suggesting a murder was completed by a political enemy. Genuine efforts are not applied when searching for the true perpetrators behind murders related to reporters. The state only gives an impression of investigating certain crimes, so it is no surprise that the high-profile murders of Klebnikov and Politkovskaya can remain unresolved for a long period of time. Theories about journalists' murders commonly develop after a journalist's murder, rather than a serious investigation. Successful prosecution of the definite criminals acting violently against journalists would show the strength of the nation's legal institutions. But unfortunately, impunity is becoming more familiar and justice more infrequent with each year Putin remains in office.

President Vladimir Putin has often displayed personal hostilities. From punishing investigative journalists to heavily taxing independent businesses, such as Media Most, to imprisoning businessmen, such as Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khordovsky, Putin has exhibited authoritarian tendencies. My research suggests that as long as Putin remains in power, little will be done to strengthen Russia's rule of law. His political record reveals arbitrary rule and personal vendettas. The absence of rule of law penetrates Putin's Russia. Criminal immunity exists alongside arbitrary rule, damning justice and progress. Since the rule of law is weakening, it is fair to say movement towards a democracy is not occurring. Based on my research

specifically focused on the murders of Anna Politkovskaya and Paul Klebnikov, one can surmise that Putin's government is an authoritarian government.

The research done here could be complemented through an empirical analysis of the different social classes, age groups and regions within Russia. Proper surveys could gather public opinion on Russian citizen's understanding of different current domestic and international political situations and compare their answers with the truth. I would also see how many support the regime and why they do or do not. I would additionally ask how comfortable they feel publically expressing a view contrary to the government. Also, I would inquire their opinion on Putin. I would specifically ask if they believe the current president is a good leader for Russia and why they have reached that conclusion. I think it would also be important to ask if the state's courts are a useful and accessible tool for the public. Unfortunately, I did not have the resources to conduct this research and collect this important data. But according to the information I did gather, Russia is not a democracy by any means. The two test cases I have presented point to Putin engaging in an authoritarian regime.

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