

## **Navalny Demonstrations Deepen Split in Putin's Elite and Bring His End and Its Closer, Piontkovsky Says**

### **Opinion**

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**&ldquo;&hellip;if the history of the Soviet Union was a Shakespearean tragedy of world importance, then the history of the Putin empire is a vulgar and disgusting provincial farce,&rdquo; Piontkovsky says.**

By Paul Goble for &ldquo;Window on Eurasia&rdquo;; October 7 &ndash; It is now a commonplace that Vladimir Putin&rsquo;s fate will be decided not at the polls next month but by 15 to 20 of the most powerful figures around him, Andrey Piontkovsky [pictured] says; and the evidence is mounting that these people are increasingly divided about Putin and his policies. That is why the demonstrations Aleksey Navalny has organized are so important, the Russian commentator continues, because their massive quality shows that there are other groups within the population on whom Putin&rsquo;s opponents could rely if they removed him from power in order to save themselves and Russia ([svoboda.org/a/28777508.html](http://svoboda.org/a/28777508.html)). Today, for the third time since last spring, Piontkovsky points out, &ldquo;tens of thousands of young people in a hundred cities of Russia&rdquo; have gone into the streets in response to Navalny&rsquo;s slogan, &ldquo;&rsquo;Putin is a thief!&rsquo;&rdquo; And their action today is especially symbolic not only because it is Putin&rsquo;s birthday but because it is the ninth anniversary of the murder of Anna Politkovskaya. According to the Russian commentator, &ldquo;there are clear signs that Navalny&rsquo;s anti-Putin campaign is supported by definite circles among the powers that be, including the *siloviki*&rdquo; and that &ldquo;the Putin &lsquo;bunker&rsquo; is extremely concerned by all this&rdquo; because that raises questions about just how loyal the Kremlin leader&rsquo;s inner circle now is. That circle consists of people who gained power and wealth thanks to Putin but who wanted to combine anti-Western attitudes with Western standards of living and the ability to travel and even live freely in Western countries. Putin by his actions has threatened all that, Piontkovsky says. This inner group and Putin himself are very much aware that Margarita Simonyan&rsquo;s observation in 2011 remains valid: &ldquo;After the first free elections in Russia, they will hang all of us&rdquo; ([kommersant.ru/doc/1836628](http://kommersant.ru/doc/1836628)). And so they know that they date not entrust the problem of Russia&rsquo;s future leadership to the ballot box with someone like Navalny competing. But at the same time, Piontkovsky argues, &ldquo;doubts have arisen&rdquo; within the powers that be &ldquo;about Putin&rsquo;s capacity to effectively fulfill over the next six years the most important function for them, the maintenance of relations with &ldquo;the eternally hated and eternally beloved West,&rdquo; where they have stashed &ldquo;already trillions (!) of dollars.&rdquo; In addition, Putin&rsquo;s own recent behavior has sent shockwaves through the inner circle, the Russian analyst continues. It is clear to them that &ldquo;Putin is really fed up with everything&rdquo; and may lash out at anyone at any time regardless of past service or present loyalty. And they are asking themselves whether they want to be at risk of &ldquo;THIS for a minimum of another six years.&rdquo; According to Piontkovsky, &ldquo;the Kremlin corporation is the direct heir of the communist nomenklatura&rdquo; and has the ability to &ldquo;remove by one means or another the first person who has lost his adequacy&rdquo; as far as they are concerned. But most of its obvious choices such as relying on Kadyrov to &lsquo;cleanse&rsquo; the political

arena aren't attractive. Today, "the corporation has neither people, nor ideas, nor even desires. Fukuyama's end of history for it has come already long ago." And they at least recognize that there is a risk that if they do nothing, Russia could plunge into the abyss for the third time in the last century in ways that could prove as fateful as 1917 or 1991. But if the history of the Soviet Union was a Shakespearean tragedy of world importance, then the history of the Putin empire is a vulgar and disgusting provincial farce," Piontkovsky says. And so the inner circle must choose between the end of the Putin regime or the end of Russia and themselves. It is not that hard to imagine which many of them will choose, he suggests. And that in turn means that this group is likely to take action against Putin in a matter of days or weeks rather than wait until something else happens. Piontkovsky includes as a headnote to his article an insight offered by the late Russian political analyst Dmitry Furman before his death in 2011. "A feeling of hopelessness always intensified when hated regimes already have passed their peak and their life cycle is approaching its end" ([ng.ru/ideas/2010-06-09/5\\_revolution.html](http://ng.ru/ideas/2010-06-09/5_revolution.html)). Indeed, Furman said, "the feeling of hopelessness is a sign of the beginning of the end and that the way out is near."

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The commentary above is from Paul Goble's "Window on Eurasia" series and appears here with the author's permission. Contact Goble at: [paul.goble@gmail.com](mailto:paul.goble@gmail.com)