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Putin's Revolution and War at a "Historical Crossroads"

By Stephen R. Covington

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Vladimir Putin seeks to dismantle the US-led transatlantic and global order so that Russia can exercise greater power regionally and internationally. His paths to attaining greater power are constructed on the strategy and tactics of continuous revolution against the Western system; the necessity of constant crises and tension with the West; and the acceptance of war as a means to accumulate more power outside Russia and maintain power inside it.

“The unipolar world is being relegated into the past. We are at a historical crossroads. We are in for probably the most dangerous, unpredictable and at the same time most important decade since the end of World War II. The West is unable to rule humanity single-handedly and the majority of nations no longer want to put up with this. This is the main contradiction of the new era. To cite a classic, this is a revolutionary situation to some extent—the elites cannot and the people do not want to live like that any longer. This state of affairs is fraught with global conflict or a whole chain of conflicts.... The change of eras is a painful albeit natural and inevitable process. A future world arrangement is taking shape before our eyes.”

—Vladimir Putin, Valdai Discussion Club Meeting, October 27, 2022

Vladimir Putin’s war against Ukraine is more than a large-scale war over territory, culture, and history. His war against Ukraine is part of a broader revolutionary pattern of Russian pressure and assault on the US-led Western global system. Russia’s war is calculated. Its intent is to break Ukraine, end Ukraine’s quest to secure its democracy within Western institutions, and spark, accelerate, and broaden a perceived weakening of the US-led post-World War II security order through the pressure of war and a defeat of Ukraine.

At a perceived historical crossroads in both Russia’s post-Soviet development and the global order, Putin seeks to dismantle the US-led transatlantic and global order so that Russia can exercise greater power regionally and internationally—power he maintains Russia is ordained to possess. His aims are absolute. Putin’s paths to attaining greater power are constructed on the strategy and tactics of continuous revolution against the Western system; the necessity of constant tension and crises with the West to achieve his system-change aims; and the acceptance of war as a way to accumulate more power outside Russia and preserve his power inside Russia. Putin is organizing Russia for calculated strategic confrontation with the West. His choice to take these paths to greater Russian power, and the corresponding impact of this strategic choice for Russia, hold substantial risks for transatlantic and global security in the decade ahead.

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Revolution Against the Western Order

Putin's latter years of power have been characterized by two concurrent patterns: the stage-by-stage dismantling of democracy and freedoms inside Russia and the stage-by-stage rejection of the West, its democratic values, and the institutions that uphold them. This is not a coincidence. These processes are linked and interdependent. The Western system represents a challenge to Putin's autocratic authority and limits a non-democratic Russia's exercise of power abroad.

State-controlled Russian disinformation intentionally obscures these two concurrent patterns of Russia's development under Putin and distorts the image of the Western system, making it both irrationally Russophobic and a threat to Russia. Russian claims of "US hegemony" and NATO's "Eastern expansion" (rasshirenie na vostok) are designed to project a hostile US/NATO intent toward Russia. Moscow characterizes NATO Alliance military power "on Russia's border" as a grave threat.

However, for Putin, the greatest fear is not of NATO's military power, but of the principles and values Western military power protects: freedom, individual rights, the rule of law, and democracy. His war against Ukraine, in addition to allowing increased suppression of rights inside Russia, indicates that he fears the enlargement of the community of countries pursuing a democratic course because it has implications for his authoritarian control over his own country.

Putin set Russia on an authoritarian path more than two decades ago to ensure that his power could not be challenged internally. This path necessitated increasingly severe restrictions of freedoms for the Russian people, greater power for the security services, greater wealth for Kremlin-connected business leaders, and greater investment in the military. Putin made sure that Russians knew they had no democratic future. At the same time, he began the process of reversing Russia's strategic integration into Western institutions. What Russian reformers understood as the strengths of Western democracies—institutions and organizations that uphold and reinforce principles and values of democracy, freedoms, and the rule of law—Putin saw as direct threats to his rule. Consequently, he chose to further distance Russia from these institutions, discredit them, and redefine Russia's post-Soviet path.

Over time, Putin increasingly pressured the US-led global order, seeking to challenge its norms, principles, and rules. He sought to delegitimize Western institutions by undermining the unity of Western governments and countries, intimidating opposition at home and abroad, organizing regional and global opposition, and staking claims through military action in Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2014), and Syria (2015). All these efforts were aimed at gaining advantage that could be translated into more Russian power and more political leverage in reshaping a future international order.

Putin sees Western liberal democracy as a threat to Russia's sovereignty. In his view, the Western system is not democratic because its rules and values deny other countries the historical and cultural civilization from which their leaders derive their legitimacy.¹ He criticizes the Western liberal democratic order as being autocratic, dictating its rules to other countries. In his view, a democratic international order is one that accepts diverse forms of government, including those that operate without constraint and untouched by Western democratic principles, values, norms, and rules. Putin initially held the view that the Western system would remain in place in some form

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and Russia would seek a more powerful place in it. He spoke of the need for new rules in the global system, but at the same time, stressed the need to preserve its checks and balances—in particular, the need to preserve ways to regulate competition.²

Putin now holds the view that what he perceives as the imposition of liberal democratic values by the Western order must be brought to an end through the dismantling of the order itself; only in this way can a truly democratic order emerge. He frequently communicates to Russian society a binary vision of the future: either the Western system will continue to exist, leading to Russia's strategic defeat (*strategicheskoe porazhenie*), or Russia will continue to exist, and the Western system will be dismantled and replaced. Putin uses this vision of a choice between Russia defeated or Russia triumphant to justify his move to extreme forms of action—revolution and war—to achieve his aims.

For Putin's Russia, the Western system must be replaced. It cannot be adapted, reorganized, reset, or redrawn with new lines. It must come to an end for a new global order to rise on different principles and interests—ones that advantage Russia. This vision of a new global order leaves little space for a “Yalta 2” agreement, built on co-existence, mutual security, and mutually accepted spheres of influence with the Western system.³ Such an approach would not lead to a global system that secures Russian power because the existence of a Western system alongside a new system would permit a more powerful West to reorganize itself along new dividing lines and continue to exercise its greater power.

Putin's vision of a future global order is more decisive. Putin's Russia seeks a European security architecture organized to allow Russia to exercise its power to maximum effect. That vision foresees a Europe without NATO and without a US presence in European affairs; without a global order tied to the United States, and without European organizations that uphold the fundamental principles of protecting freedom, the rule of law, and Western democracy. Moscow also seeks a greater leading role at the global level so that it can work with other powers and actors to curb and counter US power in the Arctic, the Euro-Atlantic, and the Indo-Pacific. As Putin implied in his 2022 Valdai discussion, Russia's greater power within a new global order can be realized in the medium term: the decade ahead.

This decisive aim requires a decisive path to achieve it, and Putin is using the strategy and tactics of continuous revolution against the Western system to attain his aims. As Vladimir Lenin stated, there can be no revolutionary movement without revolutionary theory. Putin has a revolutionary theory, and it describes the overall nature and course of the revolution and the war he advocates and directs. His revolutionary theory is driven by a strategic culture informed by the past and organized for today's regional and global realities. That culture is built on exploiting governing processes, systems, and trends to shape events, drive change, and gain advantage.

Putin's historical, cultural, and political views about Russia are shaped by a range of individuals, including fascist ideologues Ivan Il'in and Aleksandr Dugin. However, his words and ideas about revolution, security systems, and fundamental change where one system is replaced by another have Leninist roots.⁴ Leninist phrases such as “revolutionary situation”, “elites”, and “contradictions”—all common in Putin's Soviet education and professional life in the KGB—are part of his language and theory of change. They impart an understanding of the decisive character of the strategic course of change set for Russia under Putin's leadership.⁵ Combined with his self-

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serving distortions of history, Putin's understanding of revolution and its role in reshaping the global order sets the framework for current and future decisions on the Ukraine war, any other war, or any other effort to damage the Western order.

As was the case with revolutionary thinking from the Soviet era, Putin's thinking holds that a more just world order is a natural process with inevitable outcomes, shaped by a powerful wave of change that cannot be contained. Putin's description of the world standing at a historical crossroads and the decade ahead as the "most dangerous and important, and fraught with risk of global conflict" is similar to Soviet-era thinking about a decisive crossroads for capitalism and socialism. Capitalism was expected to strike out in its crisis phase to preserve its power against socialism. His assessment of the current world order as in the process of being relegated to the past is reminiscent of Trotsky's "dustbin of history" statement to the Mensheviks.⁶ His comments on US "rotteness" harkens back to Lenin's quote on crises expanding and becoming more complicated, and ultimately producing the "collapse of all that is rotten" in the capitalist system.⁷

Putin's justification of his war against Ukraine as defensive is similar to the Soviet justification for planning strategic military offensive operations against NATO as defending the "gains of socialism". He uses a characterization of the Western system as rotten, in crisis, and seeking to prevent the emergence of a new global order to justify Russian military aggression in general and the deliberate breaking of the rules of the current international order. Putin's efforts to fuel and exploit the global south's opposition to the US-led global order are modern versions of Soviet characterizations of colonialism used during the Cold War. Former President Dmitri Medvedev's statement that "everything done against an enemy is legal" is characteristically Bolshevik.⁸ His comment takes the logic of revolution with absolute aims to an extreme: all actions are justified because the success or failure of this revolution will have a decisive outcome for Putin and Russia.

While the roots of Putin's ideas can be traced to well-known Soviet-era phrases about the ultimate victory of socialism over capitalism, the purpose of this language is to project the image of an enlightened leader taking Russia forward with the power of history behind him. This political rationale for revolution and war also can resonate inside Russia, and align philosophically with China's leadership's understanding of the global order through its communist ideology. For the Russian population, it also can obscure the harsh reality of a leader whose ambition is to gain more power internally and externally and who is willing to use force outside Russia's borders to do so.

Putin's revolution is melded with his legitimacy as leader of Russia. He has portrayed himself as the only Russian leader who can navigate Russia through this "crossroads" of history. When confronted by the damage to Russia's power caused by his decision to attack Ukraine, he strove to convince the Russians that only he could maneuver the country to regain advantage. He uses revolutionary terms to communicate to the elites his understanding of Russia's path to greater power, while simultaneously mobilizing society around the specific war aims of eliminating "Nazism" and countering the existential military threat posed by Ukraine and the West.

Putin uses revolution against the Western system to justify his autocratic rule and his place in Russian history as the one-man vanguard of a revolution to strengthen Russian power. His revolution is the basis for Russia's pursuit of global security.

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This revolutionary framework sets the parameters for his future decisions on the power he seeks abroad, the strategic conditions he sets or exploits, the dilemmas and threats he poses, the actions he takes, and the outcomes he pursues.

War Against Ukraine as a Driver of the Revolution

Revolution is high-risk, unpredictable, and characterized by crises. Putin's aims require continuous revolution, not dissimilar to Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, and require a complete breakdown of the security system in Europe. The Putin revolution requires unfreezing the global security system, transitioning to a fluid period in which countries stake claims to shape the new system, and then refreezing as a new system on new terms with rules advantageous to Russia. All three phases involve crisis, confrontation, and conflict—possibly great-power conflict—over the fundamental elements of a new order.

In Putin's revolution, crises are fueled by great-power competition over sharply different fundamental aims, and as such are an expected and necessary part of the revolution—a natural, inevitable, and painful part of the process of change. The outcome of these crises drives, if not determines, the pace and direction of change in the overall Western order, leading to its collapse.⁹ In this struggle over the current global system, Putin is constrained by neither ideology nor risk aversion. His signature pattern in crisis and confrontation is his willingness to risk more than his opponents to achieve his aims. His turn to revolution and war is testament to his willingness to be a risk-taker. It also reflects his perception of what is at stake for him and for Russia.

Lenin is credited with saying “sometimes—history needs a push.” For Putin, the Ukraine war was intended as a spark similar to the spark (*iskra*) in Leninist revolutionary theory, designed to generate and build momentum in the overall revolutionary effort against the Western system. There were three desired strategic outcomes of the war for Russia: break Ukraine, end Ukraine's quest to secure its democracy through Western institutions, and spark, accelerate, and broaden a perceived breakdown of the US-led post-World War II security order through the pressure of war and the defeat of Ukraine.

In the Russian leadership's view, Ukraine today is a product of the West and seeks to remain in the West; the Euro-Atlantic order is the center of gravity for the Western system, and Russia's main target is that system's security component. The ultimate revolutionary objectives cannot be achieved only by defeating Ukraine. The war must serve as a catalyst to the breakup of the Western security order in Europe. The war also must be prosecuted in coordination with intensified hybrid warfare or system warfare against the Western order, with Russia employing multiple instruments of power to target security systems, their networks, their members, and, most critically, the institutions that uphold their values and principles.

Putin's decision to undermine the Western system by attacking Ukraine also aligned with the Russian view of a transatlantic system in crisis following the US/NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2020. At a minimum, the war reflected Russian perceptions of declining Western political will and unity. Seen through the historical lens of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, which was followed in the fall of 1989 by the East European “Velvet Revolutions” that effectively ended the Warsaw Pact, the war against Ukraine may have been an opportunity

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to capitalize on perceived Western political disunity and accelerate a broader erosion of political unity in the transatlantic security order.

Putin's strategic approach is an "all-of-Russia" war against Ukraine to support an "all-of-Russia" revolution against the Western system. Putin is conducting a three-front strategy in the war against Ukraine: first, to intensify Russian military operations against Ukrainian forces, damage forces and infrastructure with strikes and grinding ground advances to demoralize and weaken nationwide defense and political will to continue the war; second, to divide Ukraine politically, damage confidence that the Ukrainian leadership can prosecute the war, and create the inevitability of Russian victory in the minds of Ukrainian citizens and their leaders; and third, to break the sustainability of Western support to Ukraine and deal the West a political defeat simultaneously with a Ukrainian military defeat. Western support to date is built on confidence in Ukraine's leadership, strategy, and forces. Russia is targeting this confidence.

Two years into the war, Moscow has suffered over 450,000 Russian casualties, including tens of thousands of deaths, and enormous losses of military equipment. It is now spending 30% of the 2024 federal budget on a massive military reorganization and rearmament—all the while increasing its dependence on North Korea and Iran for weapons. Russian prisoners are being released to fight in the war. There have been more breakdowns of the Russian military than operational breakthroughs on the battlefield. There has been armed rebellion inside Russia, and senior military officers have been purged for alleged corruption. China is exploiting Russia for long-term strategic geopolitical gain to sustain its power aspirations. A substantial shift in NATO's overall strength has taken place with Finland's and Sweden's entry, increased national defense spending among allies (notably Germany and Poland), and sustained Western support of Ukraine's defense. Despite these outcomes of Putin's war, the three original strategic aims still drive his uncompromising continuation of the war against Ukraine.

In this period of war, Putin has prioritized the preservation of power at home; organized the production of military power for potential operational scale actions against Ukraine; built new economic and military-technical relations with other countries to offset damage to relations with NATO and G-7 members; and initiated reconstitution and reorganization of the state. Moscow has executed a nation-wide buildup of military power (*narashchivanie sil i sredstv*) over the last year and will continue to increase in size over the coming years. These forces are part of the rebuild and reorganization of Russia's European theater of war posture, not only for prosecution of the war against Ukraine. This ongoing buildup is the first phase of nationwide military reconstitution designed to achieve operational advantage in the Ukrainian war and gain operational advantage in Russia's postwar military posture vis-a-vis NATO.

Revolution and War—Power and Force

Putin has merged revolution and war as a necessary step to realizing his strategic objectives. Concurrently, Moscow is orchestrating "multi-instruments of power"—strategic dilemmas directly targeting Ukraine, the Euro-Atlantic order, and the global order—all executed simultaneously for maximum collective effect.

The Kremlin has returned Russia to policies and strategies centered on accruing "power and force" (*vlast' i sila*)

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to gain advantage against the Western system. In the logic of his revolution and war, only advantage is to be trusted and sought. Putin maneuvers only for advantage, to strengthen Russia and strengthen his position inside the Russian system. Advantage is the only form of security Moscow accepts for the purpose of shaping a new global order. At the same time, the mutually reinforcing logic of revolution and war narrows decision-making, creates false choices, and can produce “no choice” decisions; on numerous occasions Putin has described himself as having “no choice” but to go to war with Ukraine based on his assessment that there may be a stronger West and a stronger, democratic Ukraine in the future.

Putin’s visions of Russia’s future, with its pursuit of advantage, embrace of revolution, and acceptance of war as a way to gain advantage changes fundamental aspects of Russian security policy that have shaped the Cold War and post–Cold War periods. His vision of the future as one requiring the dismantlement of the Western system in absolute terms leaves limited space for co-existence and mutual security with the West and its global system. He consistently rejects mutual security with the West (except in the nuclear sphere, where mutually assured destruction remains a guiding principle), because he sees it as advantaging the more powerful West. The West is now seen as an adversary and the Russians understand mutual security as giving the West equal opportunity to pursue its objectives. According to Putin, those objectives are to have the opportunity to strike Russia and even destroy it.¹⁰ Mutual security with the West also conveys Russian acquiescence to the Western global system, contradicting Putin’s aim of dismantling it.

Putin is organizing the Russian state to sustain revolution, war against Ukraine, and pressure and assault on the Western system. His “all-of-Russia” revolution is determining how the country is organized, society mobilized, industry prioritized, foreign policy aligned, military structured, and internal and external communications centered. Moscow seeks and combines opportunities for hard power employment and harsh employment of soft power for maximum effect to sustain revolution and war. Putin’s centralized control of these instruments of power—their employment and administration—gives Russia greater ability to focus on the single objective of sustaining revolution and war.

The “Painful” Decade Ahead

Putin has long sought to change the world around Russia in ways that strengthen Russian power and simultaneously prevent political change inside the country.¹¹ His merger of revolution and war and calculated moves to build and accumulate power and force are familiar practices of former Russian and Soviet authoritarian leaders. Putin’s understanding of Russia’s security and power is personal. His revolution reflects a conclusion that the greatest tragedy of the twenty-first century for Russia will be the continued existence of the US-led order and the rules-based system built over eight decades.

The Western system was designed principally to prevent great-power wars through the strategic integration of its member states, including former World War II adversaries. It is built on the rule of law, freedom, and liberal democracy. A weakening of the Western system increases the risk that crises could lead to war, and ultimately great-power war. Ten years ago, Putin himself warned of the risks to the global situation if some of the features of

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the Western system that regulated competition did not remain in place. He said it would be a system that relied solely on brute force.¹² Putin no longer has any use for the restraining features of the Western system.

His revolution is using brute force and power in war. In Putin's view, the collapse of the Western system would give birth to a new order, but this process could also be accompanied by conflict and war. Russia is preparing for the next phase of the Ukraine war and for the crises that are natural and inevitable during the "change of era" for the global order.

Putin's future decision-making will retain the characteristics of his decisions in recent years: the pursuit of advantage and power, risk-taking, and miscalculation. More than 17 years of political thinking and state-building has led Russia to its current position in the regional and global order. It is unlikely to change in the short- to mid-term. The decision-making process built on Putin's political theory and state-power capacity is unlikely to be replaced by a political decision-making process dominated by calculation and caution in pursuit of stability. It is equally unlikely that Putin will stop the revolution, demobilize the armed forces, deconstruct the war economy, re-embrace the acceptance of the Western system and its principles of mutual security, and reach political, economic, conflict-resolution, or arms agreements with Western countries while preserving his political power at home.

Putin's decision to go to war with Ukraine is one example of the merger of the logic of revolution and war. The framework in which revolution fueled the Ukraine war and the Ukraine war served the aims of the revolution can lead Putin to other "no choice" decisions and spark other crises or conflicts in the future.

Putin's personal power inside Russia and the place that he seeks in Russian history as vanguard of this movement are now connected. The failure of revolution abroad risks counter-revolution and loss of power in Russia. Putin will thus require greater control over Russia concurrent with the execution of revolution and war outside its borders. Putin's system of power requires the ability to maneuver to preserve Russia's advantage. At the same time, it requires an external enemy—a threat outside the country that is greater than the mistrust inside the Russian system—to maintain internal cohesion and centralized control over Russia. Trotsky's revolutionary theory spoke of the dualism of revolution and the risk of counterrevolution. Evgenii Prigozhin's June 2023 rebellion was a clear reminder of the risk that counterrevolution could emerge inside Russia from the stress imposed on a leadership and society pursuing revolution and war.

A multi-year organization of the Russian state around revolution and war to achieve a change in a global order further locks the Russian political, economic, and military system into a structure that can only sustain revolution and war, and simultaneously places enormous stress on Russian society. Perhaps already, but certainly within a few years, Russia will be locked into a revolution-and-war-driven state organization. Economic growth is now being achieved mainly by investment in the defense sector. Reversing this will create economic structural shocks that could undermine cohesion and control. In the years ahead, even with a fundamental shift of Russian policy away from revolution and war, shifting to reform will be more complex to manage than the transformation of the USSR and its war economy was—and will have enormous implications for Russian stability and Western security.

Putin's merger of revolution and war is a flawed foundation for Russia's security and power in the twenty-first century. His "no choice" decision on Ukraine is an admission that his political theory takes him, and Russia, into a dead end. Russian power expanded over the last three decades because of the country's participation in the

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Western system. Russia now is dramatically expending that power in pursuit of revolution against the Western system. Russian sovereignty was preserved over those decades in the Western system as well. If its sovereignty had not been preserved, Russia would not have accumulated the power it now possesses to challenge the global order. As Putin weakens Russia, uses its people as its cheapest and most expendable resource, pushes Russia into an unstable period characterized by transactional relationships with other autocratic states, loses power to other countries in pursuit of revolution and war, he will in turn blame the Western system for Russia's decline.

The constraints on his revolution are enormous, yet his aims to replace the post–World War II order are unlimited in ambition. His pursuit of these aims is uncompromising. Russian society and armed forces are under pressure to sustain revolution, crises, and war. The Western system is economically superior and capable, if given time, of thwarting Putin's ambitions. His pursuit of revolution and war can leave Russia in a grim condition. His propaganda machine relentlessly highlights Russia's technological achievements and modernization and its success on the battlefield, as well as weakness and disarray in the Western system. It also emphasizes international respect for Russia, unity of the elite and the people, and nostalgia for the Soviet and imperial Russian past.

However, the reality is that Russia is autocratically ruled, substantially stressed by the war and revolution, exploited by its partners, and strategically less competitive in its ability to keep pace with its adversaries. Russian society is unprepared for the stress of revolution against a global system. Putin's approach is a familiar formula autocrats use to preserve power at the expense of their country's stability and security, and in this respect the formula serves its purpose. However, as Lenin warned, not all revolutionary situations lead to revolution. Putin's decision to pursue revolution and war in this decade is a strategic miscalculation, and one that can produce further miscalculation.

The limits of Russian power and force—some inherent, others imposed—constrain Putin's more aggressive pursuit of his revolutionary aims and his use of military force outside Russia's borders. Inherent Russian limits can be overcome with time. Limits imposed on Russia depend on the political will and capacity of NATO and G7 countries to sustain actions against Putin. Ukraine's resistance and warfighting strength, Western support of Ukraine, and Western economic and political pressure in all forms have imposed limits on Russian power. If these are lifted, Putin would be able to match the level of his aggression against the Western system with his level of revolutionary ambition.

Putin's logic of revolution and war has enormous implications for the future course of the war against Ukraine, which is itself part of a broader strategic pattern of Russian pressure and assault on the global security system. The West must not address the war in terms of temporary crisis response. Putin's strategic pattern requires Western collective security and defense both as a response to his revolution and his war against Ukraine, and to manage Russia's strategic confrontation in the future.

Guided by a policy construct that only seeks advantage, Putin's Russia simultaneously respects advantage held by others. Limiting the damage caused by Putin's revolution and war will require the West to unite to protect its advantages: its legitimacy, rule of law foundations, economic power, technological superiority, and regional and global military power. These advantages, set in place by the stakeholders in the Western system, can limit Russia's ambitions and miscalculations when clearly and consistently demonstrated and communicated to the Russian leadership and its authoritarian partners.

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Neither Putin's revolution, nor his war, is near an end. The revolution's aims, and what he perceives to be at stake if he does not achieve them, shape what Russia will commit and risk in the Ukraine war or any other war. Putin has decided upon paths to attain greater Russian power and is leading Russia into a new phase of strategic confrontation with the West over the US-led regional and global order.

He has predicted that the decade ahead would be "the most dangerous, unpredictable, and important since the end of World War II ... and fraught with global conflict". Putin's destabilizing and calculated revolution, war, and internal power preservation aims—his choices for Russia at the "historical crossroads"—could make this a reality. He is organizing and preparing Russia for this future.

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Endnotes

1) “Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Plenary Session of the 19th Annual Meeting”, October 27, 2022. <https://valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-club/>. “For many years, Western ideologists and politicians have been telling the world there was no alternative to democracy. Admittedly, they meant the Western-style, the so-called liberal model of democracy. They arrogantly rejected all other variants and forms of government by the people.... So currently, an overwhelming majority of the international community is demanding democracy in international affairs and rejecting all forms of authoritarian dictate by individual countries or groups of countries. What is this if not the direct application of democratic principles to international relations?.... What stance has the “civilised” West adopted? If you are democrats, you are supposed to welcome the natural desire for freedom expressed by billions of people, but no.”

2) “Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club”, October 25, 2014, p. 2. https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/vladimir-putin-meets-with-members-of-the-valdai-discussion-club-transcript-of-the-final-plenary-sess/?sphrase_id=1657398. “The main thing is that this system needs to develop, and despite its various shortcomings, needs to at least be capable of keeping the world’s current problems within certain limits and regulating the intensity of the natural competition between countries. It is my conviction that we could not take this mechanism of checks and balances that we built over the last decades, sometimes with such effort and difficulty, and simply tear it apart without building anything in its place. Otherwise we would be left with no instruments other than brute force

3) Ibid. “This is why we see attempts at this new historic stage to recreate a semblance of a quasi-bipolar world as a convenient model for perpetuating American leadership”.

4) Chapter 7, “Strategy and Tactics” in Joseph Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*, 1924. For example, see Lenin’s instructions on strategic leadership during revolution.

5) “The Collapse of the Second International, 1915”. Vladimir Il’ich Lenin, *Collected Works*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, 21:205–59.

6) “Go where you belong from now on—into the dustbin of history!” (Trotsky’s statement to the Menshevik faction.) All-Russian Congress of Soviets, October 25, 1917 in Petrograd; and Dmitri Volkogonov, *Trotsky: The Eternal Revolutionary*, trans. and ed. Harold Shukman. The Free Press, 2008.

7) Putin referred to “all the rottenness of the American political system, which cannot pretend to teach others about democracy,” *Forum in Vladivostok*. Reuters. com September 12, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/putin-says-trump-prosecution-shows-us-system-is-rotten-2023-09-12/>.

8) Medvedev’s comments on March 7, 2024, “In hostem omina licita” (everything is legal if it is done to an enemy). in response to French President Emmanuel Macron’s statements on support for Ukraine. TASS.com, March 7, 2024.

9) See Putin’s description of the character of a changing order as being “accompanied by if not global war and conflict, then by chains of intensive local-level conflicts.” Putin Valdai Speech, 2014.

10) Putin’s Presidential Address to the National Assembly, February 29, 2024. He stated, “Russia is ready for dialogue with the United States on issues of strategic stability. However, it is important to clarify that in this case we are dealing with a state whose ruling circles are taking openly hostile actions towards us.” <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/73585>

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