

The *vertikal*: power and authority in Russia

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The president is considered to be the central and final figure of authority in Russia, wielding power over the government and over the formulation and implementation of policy. Such an understanding was enhanced and emphasized during the eight years of Vladimir Putin's presidency from 2000 to 2008, during which he sought to recentralize control, strengthen the central state and establish a strong vertical of power by appointing loyal figures to important positions to implement policy decisions.¹

Such policies had a significant impact on our understanding of the developing nature of Russian politics, and two main interrelated debates emerged, both focusing on the nature of Russia's democratic development. The first built on the longer-term debate about the country's post-Soviet transition to democracy, or indeed, increasingly away from it, weaving into this discussion the idea of democracy with qualifications, such as managed or over-managed democracy and sovereign democracy.² The second debate was related to this, but focused less on the policies and more on the backgrounds of those Putin appointed to establish his vertical of power, particularly security services personnel.³ As a result, one observer acknowledged the formation of a consensus that by 2008 Russian democracy was

* The views expressed are the author's own and should not be attributed to either the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or the NATO Defense College. The article builds on views first outlined in a briefing paper published by Chatham House in May 2011 and presented to a discussion group at Chatham House in July 2011. The author would like to thank the participants for their comments and reflections. The author has also benefited from correspondence with Wayne Allensworth, and would like to thank members of the Roman Baths group and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments on the text.

¹ See Olga Kryshnanovskaya and Stephen White, 'Inside the Putin court: a research note', *Europe-Asia Studies* 57: 7, Nov. 2005, pp. 1065–75; Oleg Zaznaev, 'The presidentialisation of a semi-presidential regime: the case of Russia', in Stephen White, ed., *Politics and the ruling group in Putin's Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

² See e.g. Hans-Henning Schröder, 'What kind of political regime does Russia have?', in White, ed., *Politics and the ruling group*; and, for analysis of Russian qualified democracy, see Nikolay Petrov, Maria Lipman and Henry Hale, *Overmanaged democracy in Russia: governance implications of hybrid regimes*, Carnegie Papers 106, Feb. 2010, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/02/25/overmanaged-democracy-in-russia-governance-implications-of-hybrid-regimes/27c>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012; Ivan Krastev, "'Sovereign democracy", Russian-style', *Open Democracy*, 16 Nov. 2006, http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions_government/sovereign-democracy_4104.jsp, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

³ For contrasting views on this issue, see Olga Kryshnanovskaya and Stephen White, 'Putin's militocracy', *Post Soviet Affairs* 19: 4, 2003, pp. 289–306; Betina Renz, 'Putin's militocracy? An alternative interpretation of Siloviki in contemporary Russian politics', *Europe-Asia Studies* 58: 6, 2006, pp. 903–24.

‘in crisis’,⁴ while others argued that democracy was being rolled back in Russia and that Putin was erecting an autocracy run by the security services.⁵

Dmitry Medvedev’s succession to the presidency in 2008 altered the analytical emphasis. While debates about transition, centralization and Putin’s strength continued, the emergence of the new ‘tandem’ arrangement (or ‘tandemocracy’) of Medvedev as president and Putin as prime minister meant that analysis began to focus on the relative importance of Medvedev, who occupied the central institution of the presidency, and Putin, who, though now prime minister and therefore institutionally subordinate to the president, was still the personalized senior authority figure. Debate, particularly in some public policy and high-profile news circles, began to home in on the idea of a ‘vertical split’ between the two men, reflected in apparent distinctions and contradictions in policy preferences between them and between their administrative teams, and on speculation about when the tandem arrangement would break down—an approach Philip Hanson called ‘schism theory’.⁶

At the heart of this envisioning of a vertical split between the two authorities was the sense that, as a leader, Medvedev was more liberal and more inclined to Russia’s modernization, yet was the weaker figure and without a political support base, whereas Putin was stronger, with a well-established support base, and was more focused on maintaining the status quo. But while there were some distinctions in particular policy preferences and priorities between the two, and the tone of their respective foreign policies differed, there was no major split and the tandem arrangement was sustained.⁷

Reflecting the continued emphasis on the role of president, the debate became increasingly focused on one question: who would become Russian president in 2012—Medvedev or Putin? An answer emerged on 24 September 2011. Speaking at the United Russia party congress, Medvedev reaffirmed his ‘comradely alliance’ with Putin, announced his acceptance of the nomination to head the party electoral list—and proposed that Putin should stand in the presidential elections scheduled for March 2012.⁸ Putin accepted—and immediately suggested that Medvedev should be the next prime minister. Commentators continue to debate how sustainable the tandem will be after the election in 2012, and how long Medvedev might remain as prime minister. But senior figures in the Russian political establishment see these announcements as an important moment. Alexei Kudrin, for instance, until recently deputy prime minister and minister of finance, was one of several senior observers who stated that on 24 September 2011 the structure of *vlast*—the

⁴ Richard Sakwa, *The crisis of Russian democracy: the dual state, factionalism and the Medvedev succession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 1.

⁵ Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, ‘The myth of the authoritarian model: how Putin’s crackdown holds Russia back’, *Foreign Affairs* 87: 1, Jan.–Feb. 2008, pp. 68–84.

⁶ Philip Hanson, ‘Networks, cronies and business plans: business–state relations in Russia’, in Vadim Kononenko and Arkady Moshes, eds, *Russia as a network state: what works in Russia when state institutions do not?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 129.

⁷ For an insightful discussion of the tandem arrangement, see Peter Reddaway, ‘Two part Czar’, *The National Interest*, May/June 2009, pp. 66–75.

⁸ Speech by Dmitry Medvedev at the United Russia Party Congress, 24 Sept. 2008, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/12802>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

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Russian term for political power and authority—in the country was now set for the long term.⁹

If this is so, it suggests that the nature of power and authority in Russia has been evolving, and it is therefore time to consider once again the fundamental questions of who represents and holds power in Russia and how effectively. If the structure of *vlast'* has been set for the long term, what is it and how has it evolved? If, as suggested above, the state-building process and the establishment of the vertical had a negative impact on democratic processes, did it at least work in practical terms—does *vlast'* embody genuine authority? The narrative of Putin as a strong leader was accepted by many who assumed that he was able to implement this vertical of power to the full. And to be sure, it seems to be the case that the Russian leadership has significantly reconstituted central power and established a stable state. But to what extent is the president himself—or even the leadership team more broadly—able to set an agenda and have it implemented?

The article addresses these questions in two main parts. The first part considers the evolution of the tandem and sketches out the emergence of a leadership team. Acknowledging that Putin has a central role to play, the article suggests that the analytical focus should now be widened to encompass this ruling group more broadly. Drawing on a developing but still rather limited body of literature analysing Russia as a network state,¹⁰ the article first considers the role of formal structures, particularly as illustrated by the Security Council, then that of more informal networks.

The second part of the article examines the effectiveness of the vertical of power. There are numerous ways of addressing this difficult question. One would be to examine the effectiveness of the government as a whole—did it accomplish the tasks it set itself? Such an approach has been adopted elsewhere, with commentators observing that, despite some improvements in the payment of government salaries and the building of roads, for instance, the Russian state performs badly in terms of achieving its aims to improve public safety and health and to reduce corruption.¹¹ The approach taken here contributes to this investigation, but is more limited in scope. It adopts one of the aspects common to defining state power and capacity: assessing compliance with clearly articulated state goals through the implementation of orders and instructions.¹² Thus the article addresses the vertical of power and the authority of the leadership specifically by examining the implementation of instructions and orders emanating from traditionally the most important and authoritative figure in Russian politics—the president. The limits of the vertical are then explored, as is the consequent need for the leadership to micro-manage developments through ‘manual control’. The

⁹ ‘Alexei Kudrin ob’yasn timerichini svoei otstavki’, *Moskovski komsomolets*, 27 Sept. 2011, <http://www.mk.ru/politics/article/2011/09/27/627420-aleksey-kudrin-obyasn timerichini-svoei-otstavki.html>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

¹⁰ See Kononenko and Moshes, eds, *Russia as a network state*.

¹¹ For discussion of means of measuring state capacity, see e.g. Schröder, ‘What kind of political regime does Russia have?’, p. 15; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, ‘The myth of the authoritarian model’, pp. 69, 74; Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, *Resisting the state: reform and retrenchment in post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 8.

¹² Stoner-Weiss, *Resisting the state*, p. 8.

analysis suggests that while the Russian leadership has attempted to construct a vertical of power, this remains incomplete and many instructions are carried out only tardily or even not at all. The vertical of power may have established some form of stability; but it does not work effectively as a chain of command.

The article concludes with a reconsideration of the meaning of the vertical of power. Defined in the context of a wider cultural background—specifically the 1967 film *Vertikal*, a favourite of Putin, who knew all its songs by heart¹³—the vertical describes the task to be accomplished, enshrined in the recent strategic overhaul and Strategy 2020 documentation, and the team charged with doing it. This is not intended to suggest that the Russian leadership wishes to rebuild the USSR in some way or take Russia back to the politics of the Soviet Union's last days. Instead, it refers to the drama the film portrays: that of an adventurous team of climbers, testing themselves by choosing the difficult path up a mountain, one full of risk and danger and in which they relied on their own skills to carve the steps up the steep gradient, on their friends in the team for help, and on the security line binding them to each other for their ultimate safety. On such a mission, only trusted friends are taken, and if a friend betrays you, he is left behind. Together, the loyal, skilled team creates the forward and upward movement to achieve the task.

Russian politics is a complex and multifaceted subject, so it is worth outlining some limitations to the horizon of this article at the start. First, the article does not engage directly with the ongoing discussion, noted above, about the nature of Russian democracy or the government's popular legitimacy. Although this might be timely in the current election season, for this same reason it is likely that this will be the main focus of much analytical attention elsewhere. Second, though it broadly implies a policy continuum, the article focuses on the internal politics rather than the policies. Third, in addressing these themes and drawing them together, the analysis touches on, but does not deal in detailed fashion with, several related issues that are important in their own right, such as corruption in Russia and the use of compromising material (known as *kompromat* in Russian) in its politics.¹⁴ The final caveats to be mentioned concern methodology. The article seeks to analyse networks and group politics, which are somewhat obscure and constantly shifting. Quantitative measurement is inherently difficult, therefore, and the analysis here represents a qualitative assessment. The focus is specifically on Russia, and theoretical and wider comparisons, while perhaps possible, are not attempted.¹⁵

¹³ *Ot Pervogo Litsa: razgovory s Vladimirom Putinom* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), p. 20.

¹⁴ For an examination of corruption in Russia, see Vladimir Milov, Boris Nemtsov, Vladimir Ryzhkov and Olga Shorina, eds, *Putin. Korrupsiya. Nezavisimi expertni doklad* (Moscow: La Russophobe, April 2011). For the role of *kompromat*, see Alena Ledeneva, 'Can Medvedev change *sistema*? Informal networks and public administration in Russia', in Kononenko and Moshes, eds, *Russia as a network state*.

¹⁵ See Vadim Kononenko, 'Introduction', in Kononenko and Moshes, eds, *Russia as a network state*, pp. 12–14. It is not the intention of the article, for instance, to assert that the Russian government has specific or necessarily unique characteristics—rather, it is to attempt an analysis of power and authority in Russia. More broadly, it is not the intention of the article to engage in wider theoretical debates, though it should be noted that network theory has been critiqued: see e.g. Jonathan Joseph, 'The problem with networks theory', *Labor History* 51: 1, 2010, pp. 127–44. The author is grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for bringing this publication to his attention.

The tandem and the emergence of a leadership team

Many observers were surprised that the tandem arrangement between Putin and Medvedev survived for four years. The ascendant ‘schism theory’ anticipated a split between them, with Medvedev inevitably seeking to assert an independent trajectory and Putin trying to control this. Each speech by either man was scrutinized for evidence suggesting such divergences and for emergent rivalries. However, although there have been some differences in policy priorities and preferences, this expectation has not been borne out in reality: the tandem proved remarkably solid, even during the financial crisis of 2008–2009.

Alternative narratives to schism theory can be discerned, including one that suggests that the two men are in fact part of the same team, based on long-term personal and working relations—as Medvedev has regularly noted, he has known Putin for almost half his life, and their working relationship began in St Petersburg in the early 1990s. When Putin became prime minister in 1999 he brought Medvedev to Moscow with him, appointing him deputy head of the presidential administration and then his campaign manager for the 2000 presidential elections. Subsequently appointed first deputy prime minister by President Putin in 2005, Medvedev remained a close associate of Putin, being present in all three of his main decision-forming groups, including his informal, ‘tea-drinking’ group of personal friends.¹⁶ As a result, several Russian observers consider them part of the same team, taking the view that the tandem was in fact a mechanism for ensuring continuity after Putin’s presidency.¹⁷

Both men have repeatedly emphasized the need to establish a sustainable Russian state and to develop a team to achieve this. In 2010 for instance, Medvedev spoke about the development of ‘unified power’.¹⁸ For his part, during his end-of-year speech in 2010 Putin stated that Medvedev’s office and the government were a single team. ‘In fact, we have succeeded in establishing a united team. Yes, different points of view emerged, but not differences in the presidential administration separately, or the government separately, but within what is a common team.’ Different approaches there may have been, he continued, to one problem or another, but they were ‘resolved together’.¹⁹

Putin and Medvedev have also been making joint appointments to senior positions. These include Moscow’s new mayor, Sergei Sobyenin; the presidential envoy to the North Caucasus and deputy prime minister, Alexander Khloponin; the head of the Investigative Committee, Alexander Bastrykin; and Alexander Voloshin, appointed to lead the task force to turn Russia into an international financial centre. Others who appear to have joint blessing from both Putin and Medvedev include Vladislav Surkov, first deputy chief of staff of the presidential

¹⁶ Kryshstanovskaya and White, ‘Inside the Putin court’, pp. 1067–8.

¹⁷ For discussion of the evolution of the tandem and the relationship between Medvedev and Putin, see Andrew Monaghan, ‘The Russian *vertikal*: the tandem, power and the elections’, Chatham House briefing paper, May 2011.

¹⁸ Quoted in ‘Kandidat bez konkurentov’, *Moskovski komsomolets*, 4 Aug. 2010.

¹⁹ Putin speaking to the meeting of the Russian government, Moscow, 29 Dec. 2010, <http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/13666/>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

administration. All of these individuals have close connections with, and lengthy experience of working with, both Putin and Medvedev. As one Russian commentator has observed, 'it is not even just St Petersburgers, but classmates and personal friends and acquaintances of the president and prime minister who occupy all the key positions in the country'.²⁰

Three points stand out about the team. First, one of the most salient features of Russian politics is the broad stability and continuity of the policy formulation and implementation landscape. Appointments are deliberate and evolutionary; reshuffles are rare, and usually involve little more than the same people taking up slightly different positions. Almost all the main figures have held positions of senior authority for years, many of them since the late 1990s. Ministers rarely resign or are fired, and most have held their portfolios for several years. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has occupied his post since 2004, for instance, and Rashid Nurgaliev has been interior minister since 2002. Other important figures, such as Igor Sechin and Vladislav Surkov, have held positions of senior office in the presidential administration or government since 1999. Until his recent departure from office, Alexei Kudrin had been minister of finance for eleven years.

Second, these networks appear in both formal and more informal formats in what is characterized by Sakwa as a 'dual state'—a constitutional order buttressed by an administrative regime, in other words a government system running alongside a ruling group.²¹ The critical structure for formal power is the ruling apparatus, which includes the presidential administration and the government. Many of the key figures in these offices, as noted above, have held their positions for many years. Another formal body to be noted is the Security Council (SC). This organ is particularly noteworthy as a reservoir of authority and experience, bringing together senior federal representatives, including all the power ministries. The SC has a two-tier structure. The first tier consists of permanent members. These include Medvedev and Putin, Alexander Bortnikov (director of the Federal Security Service for the 2000 presidential elections), Boris Gryzlov (speaker of the parliament and chairman of the Supreme Council of the United Russia party), Sergei Lavrov, Valentina Matvienko (chair of the Federation Council), Sergei Naryshkin (head of the presidential administration), Rashid Nurgaliev, Nikolai Patrushev (secretary of the SC), Anatolii Serdyukov (minister of defence) and Mikhail Fradkov (director of the Foreign Intelligence Service). The second tier brings in another 18 senior government and administrative officials, including the mayor of Moscow, Sergei Sobyanin.²²

The role of the SC has evolved and grown significantly over the past ten years, and it has gained increased powers. It has emerged as a main forum for forging consensus and disseminating plans. It has played, for instance, a central prepa-

²⁰ Oleg Ptashkin, 'Zakon ob spredele', *Gazeta.ru*, 18 Jun. 2010, http://gazeta.ru/comments/2010/06/18_a_3387349.shtml, accessed 9 Jan. 2012.

²¹ Sakwa, *The crisis of Russian democracy*; Kryshstanovskaya and White, 'Inside the Putin court'; Ledeneva, 'Can Medvedev change sistema?'

²² For full membership of the Security Council, see <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/persons/sections/6/>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

ratory and consultative role in the overhaul of Russia's strategic and doctrinal documentation conducted by Moscow since 2006. On 6 May 2011 Medvedev signed an executive order granting the SC new powers that go beyond simply forecasting and assessing threats, allowing it, in theory, a role in the implementation of policy.²³ As Keir Giles has noted, the order makes it clear that the SC now determines the main directions of state domestic and foreign policy.²⁴

At the same time, informal networks are an important feature of Russian politics, and a number of Russian commentators are describing the emergence of a new Russian leadership group based around a core of some ten or eleven individuals and, as it ripples out, overlapping with formal structures to the extent of including perhaps a couple of dozen members of the government administration, including deputy prime ministers and party heads, along with leaders of big business and the security services. Specific interpretations of who precisely the members of this group are may vary slightly, but it is generally agreed to include, alongside Putin and Medvedev, Sechin, Naryshkin, Surkov, Sobyenin and Kudrin (though since his recent dismissal Kudrin may no longer be part of the inner team), and the businessmen Yuri Kovalchuk, Gennadi Timchenko, Roman Abramovich and Alisher Usmanov. On the fringes of this group are the heads of the ministries and senior political figures such as Gryzlov. This informal group, such commentators argue, plays a significant role in shaping the broader political horizon and plays a role in reaching decisions on important questions, including who was to run for president in 2012.²⁵

Third, despite its broad stability, the group itself evolves. There are, of course, well-publicized rivalries and tussles for influence among elements of the team—and there is therefore some evolution within it. As elsewhere, frictions exist within the leadership team for a number of reasons, not least because there may be difficult personal relationships. There are individuals who are direct rivals for power, and there are those who, while not direct antagonists, nonetheless hold somewhat different views about specific priorities or the means by which to achieve goals. There are also broad groupings of allies within this team with different emphases and priorities—the so-called 'clan' groupings which occasionally come into conflict.

Equally, if some are occasionally brought into the group, some also fall out of it, particularly from its formal structures and from around the fringes. For example, the former Minister for Economic Development and Trade German Gref and the former director of the Foreign Intelligence Service Sergei Lebedev, who were

²³ 'Utverzhdeno novoe Polozheniye o sovete bezopasnosti Rossii', Kremlin, 6 May 2011, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/11171>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

²⁴ For discussion of the evolving role of the SC, see Keir Giles, 'Who gives the orders in the new Russian army?', research paper (Rome: NATO Defense College, forthcoming Jan. 2012).

²⁵ See e.g. the list drawn up by Yevgeniy Minchenko, *Problema 2012 i Politburo*, http://minchenko.ru/blog/ruspolitics/2010/12/09/ruspolitics_4681.html, accessed 3 Jan. 2012. He notes the numerous people on the fringes of this permanent group. The use of the term 'politburo' should not be assumed to equate to ideas of a reconstituted 'Politburo of the USSR'. See also Dmitri Orlov, 'Start vuborov i evolyutsiya tandema: analiticheski doklad', 17 May 2011, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1404017.html>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012; Yevgeniy Minchenko and Gleb Pavlovsky, cited in Dmitri Treshanin, 'Putin uzhe ne mozhet konsolidirovat' elitu', *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 2 March 2011.

members of the formal structures in 2004, were not members during Medvedev's presidency. Mayor Yuri Luzhkov is another example. It is too early to know what will happen in Kudrin's case. Evictions from the core informal group are rarer, however, though they do happen—former first deputy director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) Viktor Cherkesov being a prominent example.²⁶

While competition and friction exist within the team, they are often overemphasized. These are frictions within one group, rather than frictions between major, separate leadership groups. The core group serves to balance competing interest groups as a whole, providing the mechanism for payoffs and compromises. It even serves to constrain the power of both Putin and Medvedev. Simple continuity of personnel should not be understood to mean that there is no prospect for change or imparting some predetermined outcome. Nevertheless, such a group is an influence for continuity and conservatism in Russia. It also suggests that the members of the Russian leadership are experienced and increasingly knowledgeable about their respective functions. Shuffles are usually minor and even 'new' replacements come from within the same broader group with similar perspectives—and so changes in policy are likely to be limited and evolutionary. Even the rather deeper shuffle that would be necessary to launch a significant change in policy or overall vision would draw on this wider group. The impact of rivalries within the team, rather than suggesting an inability to coexist, or differences over the central need for a concentration of power in a vertical of power, however, is of a different order, serving to reduce the overall effectiveness of the team and policy in implementing state goals. It is to this that the article now turns.

The evolving vertical of power

The origins of 'the vertical' can be traced to the early 1990s. One observer noted that it was in 1997 that the term 'vertical of power' was introduced by the newspaper *Rossiiskaya gazeta*—'indicating', she argued, 'that by this point the metaphorical construction had already been used sufficiently regularly to be recognised as meaningful'. 'Government from the top' had by then become the meaning of this set phrase, she stated. Interestingly, Lara Ryazanova-Clarke notes that the linguistic characteristics of the term are its 'vagueness and impersonality, as well as ... the omission of agency'.²⁷

Nevertheless, it is most strongly associated with Putin's presidential approach and his effort to establish a vertical chain of hierarchical authority, with strong, uncompromising government from the top, instilling unconditional discipline and responsibility to fulfil tasks. This is despite Putin's own limited use of the

²⁶ For excellent discussion of internal frictions, see Sakwa, *The crisis of Russian democracy*, esp. pp. 184–210; Kryshnanovskaya and White, 'Inside the Putin court'; Brian Whitmore, 'The powerless vertical', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 June 2011, http://www.rferl.org/archive/content/the_powerless_vertikal/24231321.html, accessed 4 Nov. 2011; Reddaway, 'Two part Czar'. The author is also grateful to Wayne Allensworth for his observations on this issue.

²⁷ See Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, 'How upright is the vertical? Ideological norm negotiation in Russian media discourse', in Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulson, eds, *From poets to padonki: linguistic authority and norm negotiation in modern Russian culture* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2009), pp. 293–4.

term in his public official speeches—Sakwa has noted that while Putin used the term three times in his first annual address to the Federal Assembly in 2000, he did not mention it again in later such speeches.²⁸ While this may be so, the narrative established by the Russian leadership and deliberately associated with Putin was dominated by the aim to establish order after the chaos of the 1990s—and the term became an important part of this narrative.

Alexander Goltz, a leading Russian commentator, notes that the sinking of the submarine *Kursk* in August 2000 emphasized to Putin the need for such an approach because of the way he was ‘systematically misled’ by the military authorities, who told him that the *Kursk* was in the process of being lifted and that the sinking was the result of a crash with a NATO submarine. This convinced Putin that there was no subordination among high-ranking officials and prompted him to construct his ‘now famous and ubiquitous power vertical’.²⁹ The abolition of gubernatorial elections not long after the terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004, replacing directly elected governors with appointees on the basis that effective and reliable administrators rather than elected governors were needed to combat terrorism, was seen by many as the culmination of this process.

In fact, the vertical of power remained incomplete during Putin’s presidential terms. Kathryn Stoner-Weiss has stated that at the beginning of his second term in 2005 his leadership was ‘authoritarianism without authority’: even assuming, she argued, that Putin had wanted to undertake the reforms his statements proclaimed, he simply did not possess the political authority across the country to do so.³⁰ Russian observers, too, noted that although formally Putin reasserted authority over the regions, regional governors continued to retain significant control. Moreover, the potential for the exercise of the president’s authority was ‘sapped’ by the bureaucratic machinery and the need to delegate.³¹

When Putin was president—so wielding both formal institutional and informal personal authority—he faced significant difficulties in having his instructions implemented. Vyacheslav Nikonov, president of the Russkii Mir foundation, has suggested that over 1,800 of Putin’s presidential decrees and instructions (excluding appointments) had not been implemented by the time he left office in 2008.³² Similarly, others point to low levels of implementation of presidential instructions year by year. If 2004 is supposed to be the culmination of the implementation of the vertical of power, it is striking that in 2005 just 55 per cent of presidential instructions were fulfilled. In 2006 this figure even fell, to 45 per cent.³³ Further evidence is still emerging of presidential orders issued by Putin that remain unfulfilled: for instance, an order he gave in 2005 regarding the financing of regional programmes of state guarantees for free medical assistance.³⁴ There are also numerous reports of

²⁸ Sakwa, *The crisis of Russian democracy*, p. 33.

²⁹ Alexander Goltz, ‘Putin’s power vertical stretches back to Kursk’, *Moscow Times*, 17 Aug. 2010.

³⁰ Stoner-Weiss, *Resisting the state*, pp. 147, 155; Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia’s choice* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 237–8.

³¹ Zaznaev, ‘The presidentialisation of a semi-presidential regime’, p. 37.

³² Vyacheslav Nikonov, cited in Sakwa, *The crisis of Russian democracy*, p. 32; author’s correspondence with Sakwa.

³³ I am grateful to participants in a round-table discussion at Chatham House for this point.

³⁴ Ksenia Dubicheva, ‘Polpredstvo: na Urale ne ispolnyayut porucheniya prezidenta RF’, *Rossiiskaya gazeta*,

President Putin and then Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov reprimanding ministers and ordering them to implement policies efficiently.³⁵

Similarly, it is worth noting that even Putin's specific instructions regarding personnel were not always quickly carried out. In September 2006, for instance, Putin appears to have signed an order that a number of FSB generals should be fired from senior positions as a result of investigations into a contraband case. Two months later, the generals were still in office. A year later, one of them, General Kupryazhkin, was the officer who announced the arrest of a suspect allegedly connected to the murder of Anna Politkovskaya.³⁶ A small episode, perhaps, but nonetheless revealing since the security services are supposedly the central element of Putin's loyal vertical of power, implementing his instructions.

Since he became president in 2008, Medvedev too has sought to maintain and even enhance the structure of government authority and the chain of command. Interviewed at the end of 2010, he stated that 'we need to maintain unity in governing the state when everybody is part of the same executive chain of command, the president, the government and the governors'.³⁷ Indeed, Medvedev has worked to complete the vertical of power, replacing political leaders with technocratic managers to improve the effectiveness of the state. The establishment of an integrated and disciplined bureaucracy is an ongoing project intended to enhance the manageability of the state apparatus.³⁸

It is apparent, however, that despite President Medvedev's efforts this apparatus still does not function effectively. As one editorial noted in early 2010, the handpicked officials often 'quietly sabotage the orders of the prime minister and president'. If the shortcomings in the vertical of power could be ignored before the financial crisis struck Russia (another indication that it did not work during Putin's presidency), once it had arrived the inefficiency of state officials not only dissatisfied Medvedev and Putin but posed a threat to the budget.³⁹

Official sources also concede the failures of the vertical of power. At a meeting convened to discuss the execution of presidential orders on 16 March 2010, Medvedev acknowledged the difficulties in getting instructions carried out. He asserted that strengthening managerial discipline was a necessity and admitted that he often found himself signing orders that would not change anything: nor bring about anything new, but simply reiterate an instruction already issued. In

21 July 2011. The article lists a number of other orders also unfulfilled: <http://www.rg.ru/2011/07/21/reg-ural/porucheno-anons.html>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

³⁵ Henry Gaffney, Ken Gause and Dmitry Gorenburg, *Russian leadership decision-making under Vladimir Putin: the issues of energy, technology transfer, and non-proliferation* (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, August 2007), p. 4.

³⁶ 'Uvolenni ukazom Putina generali FSB prodolzhayut rabotat', *Grani.ru*, 13 Nov. 2006, <http://www.grani.ru/Politics/Russia/FSB/m.114307.html>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012; Yulia Latynina, 'Est takie partii', *Ezhednevni zhurnal*, 4 Oct. 2007, <http://www.ej.ru/?a=note&tid=7444>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012; Yulia Latynina, 'Kod dostupa', *Radio Ekho Moskvi*, 26 April 2008, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/programs/code/510214-echo.html>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012. I am grateful to participants at a seminar at the NATO Defense College in May 2011 for a discussion on this point.

³⁷ 'Itogi goda s prezidentom rossii', televised interview with Dmitry Medvedev, 24 Dec. 2010, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/9888>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

³⁸ Maxim Agarkov, 'Modernizatsiya vertikal', *Expert*, no. 4, 1 Feb. 2010.

³⁹ 'Vertikal' loyali'nosti', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24 March 2010.

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June, a second meeting was held at which Medvedev demanded to know which officials were not fulfilling presidential orders in order that they could be punished for their shortcomings. At the meeting, Konstantin Chuichenko stated that since the beginning of 2010 the number of presidential instructions completed on time had risen by 68 per cent so that now every fifth instruction was fulfilled by the deadline.⁴⁰ According to Kremlin sources cited by Russian journalists in October 2010, Medvedev was 'particularly annoyed' by the length of time it took to prepare the paperwork for certain activities, and would often mark the paperwork with indignant personal observations about the need to work more quickly.⁴¹

To be sure, it may be argued that there is a hierarchy of orders, one governed by legal status, and that while those lower down the hierarchy, which may be no more than wish lists, are only incompletely fulfilled, the important ones at the top are indeed implemented. Nevertheless, there are visible shortfalls in the implementation of orders at different levels throughout this hierarchy that clearly have practical implications for both policy implementation and our understanding of political authority in Russia. They reflect the limitations of the leadership's ability to set an agenda and have it followed through, as illustrated by the failure to fulfil the state defence order for supplies and military equipment in 2010 (and it appears that state military orders have undergone delays again in 2011).⁴²

They also illustrate the limited ability of the leadership to respond to developments. In 2009 Medvedev criticized the government for its failure to implement more than 30 per cent of measures announced to address the financial crisis.⁴³ The fires of summer 2010 proved to be another example: Medvedev himself stated that the evidence from the investigation after the fire 'suggests a neglect of duty and criminal negligence'.⁴⁴ Indeed, the fires revealed many of those same problems that the vertical was created to resolve—local authorities, including governors and senior military officers, failed to report the spread of fires to the federal authorities, maintaining instead that they were under control (a deception that resulted in considerable damage, including the burning down of a military base). Important information was simply not passed up the chain of command to either Medvedev or Putin.⁴⁵

But perhaps the most striking illustration of both the failure of the vertical of power and its potential implications emerged after the terrorist attack at Domodedovo airport in January 2011. Not only did reports emerge that senior officials were deceiving Medvedev about firing officials as demanded;⁴⁶ it also became apparent that security plans issued after the attacks in the Moscow metro in 2010 were not being implemented and the President's new orders to increase and improve

⁴⁰ Chuichenko, cited in 'Kremlin seeks list of punished officials', *Moscow Times*, 23 June 2010.

⁴¹ Elina Bilevskaya, 'Prezidentski kontrol v rezhime onlain', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 Oct. 2010.

⁴² Report by Sergei Ivanov on disciplinary measures for failure to fulfil the state defence order, 17 May 2011, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/11257>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

⁴³ Cited in Hanson, 'Networks, cronies and business plans', p. 131.

⁴⁴ Medvedev speaking at Expanded Security Council Meeting on Fire Safety Measures for Strategic Facilities, 4 Aug., 2010. <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/8570>, accessed 9 Jan. 2012.

⁴⁵ 'Ispitaniye ognom', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 12 Aug. 2010.

⁴⁶ 'Nurgaliev obmanul prezidenta', *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 7 Feb. 2011.

security at major transport hubs in Russia were being ignored. At a meeting on transport security on 26 January 2011 Medvedev stated that plans might have been developed, but questioned whether they were being carried out. He subsequently conducted a series of inspections at railway stations and airports, visiting Kievsky station on 10 February and Vnukovo airport on 11 February. At Kievsky station he announced that the security situation was completely unacceptable, and that nothing had been done, despite all the instructions issued and the emergency circumstances. Some Russian observers said that Medvedev's visit to Kievsky station will have confirmed to him that even when his orders were fulfilled, it was done so in an incomplete manner.⁴⁷

At the same time, the limits of Putin's authority as prime minister have also been evident, as Brian Whitmore has argued.⁴⁸ The example cited above regarding the implementation of measures in response to the financial crisis also reflects on Putin's leadership and the government's ability to carry out instructions. In March 2010 Putin was reported to be deeply frustrated on discovering the costs of construction for major projects such as the Sochi Winter Olympics and the APEC summit in Vladivostok. Despite all his orders the costs kept increasing and, as a result, Putin made plain his desire that those in charge resign.⁴⁹ Yulia Latynina has also suggested that senior officials ignore the Prime Minister's orders. Following a power cut in the Moscow region over new year 2010–11, Putin ordered the Moscow region governor Boris Gromov and Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko to the affected area—but they did not go, which according to Latynina suggested that these officials could not care less about Putin's instructions and that the elite does not listen to Putin much more than to Medvedev.⁵⁰

Criticism of the vertical of power has become increasingly prominent as the federal authorities have failed to address other problems. The mass killing at Kushchevskaya in 2010 and the subsequent emergence of evidence of long-term criminal activity in the vicinity further demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the federal authorities and law enforcement agencies. Thus Russian commentators often question the idea of the vertical of power; one has asserted that instead 'there is chaos', and another that 'the authorities, in building the vertical of power, have created a system which cannot be effective. If it does not draw the necessary conclusions, a crisis of state administration will grow.'⁵¹

There are numerous and unsurprising reasons for the failures of the vertical of power as a tool for the implementation of instructions, including widespread (even systematic) corruption, incompetence and a bureaucracy so unwieldy that it is even

⁴⁷ Alexandra Samarina and Rosa Tsvetkova, 'Stranu khvatil paralich upravlenie', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 11 Feb. 2011.

⁴⁸ Whitmore, 'The powerless vertical'.

⁴⁹ 'Vertikal' loyali'nosti'.

⁵⁰ Yulia Latynina, 'Roi ili antibulochnik', *Novaya gazeta*, 25 Jan. 2010, and 'Zastupnik eliti', *Ezhednevni zhurnal*, 14 Jan. 2011.

⁵¹ 'Aleksi Navalni: Medvedev tozhe "plokhoi politseiski"', Radio Svoboda, 13 May 2011; Igor Nikolayev, 'Vsekh uvolit', *Gazeta.ru*, 4 Aug. 2010, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2010/08/04_x_3404346.shtml, accessed 3 Jan. 2012; Mikhail V'yugin and Alexander Deryabin, 'Senator Torshin prizval vooruzhit grazhdan', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 11 July 2011.

unclear exactly where instructions fail. This is related to what Sakwa has termed a 'passive revolution', in which the bureaucracy lacks creativity and passes decisions back up the chain. As one Russian commentator observed, therefore, the bureaucracy is in practice 'sovereign': it has 'spiralled out of control and is now imposing its will on the country's leaders'.⁵² In response to this situation, on 3 January 2011 Medvedev signed an executive order to reduce the number of federal civil servants in central offices and territorial agencies by 20 per cent between 2011 and 2013. Nevertheless, the plan has faced criticism, some commentators observing that it is a myth that there are too many bureaucrats, and that the problem is not the numbers but rather the effectiveness of the personnel—essentially a result of what Russian commentator Vladislav Inozemtsev calls the 'galloping de-professionalization of the Russian elite'.⁵³ At the same time, it may be that some orders are badly framed, inapplicable or inconsistent with local conditions or the existing legal framework, and so appear from below to be impossible to implement.⁵⁴

Further contributing to this situation are bureaucratic rivalries and blurred lines of responsibility between institutions and ministries, including the White House and the Kremlin, poor coordination between government agencies and the simple tendency of each agency to follow its own agenda. As noted above, there are frictions within the leadership team, and these serve to dilute the effectiveness of the vertical of power as different strands are deliberately set in conflict with one another. If networks are a source of continuity and stability, they can also serve as a source of conservatism and work against change. As Pavel Baev has pointed out, military networks bind together to prevent reforms that would be deleterious to their interests, and different networks can serve to pull a government agency in opposite directions.⁵⁵

The leadership's response to the persistently unsatisfactory situation include launching another anti-corruption drive and demanding the dismissal of incompetent officials. Beyond this, it is obliged to use 'manual control' (*ruchnoe upravleniye*) methods to ensure that orders and instructions are fulfilled. Medvedev indicated as much when, addressing the government at the end of 2010, he drew attention to the need for the leadership to become involved in regional or local matters to resolve problems. 'Perhaps', he lamented, 'we will live to see the day when the government can address only strategic questions, but unfortunately, because of the strength of several reasons, the government has to deal with operational questions, even those themes that in fact should be dealt with by regional authorities.'⁵⁶ Medvedev returned to this theme in June 2011, stating that 'what

⁵² Sakwa, *The crisis of Russian democracy*, pp. 29–32. See also Vladislav L. Inozemtsev, 'Neo-feudalism explained', *American Interest*, March–April 2011, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=939>, accessed 3 Jan. 2012.

⁵³ Inozemtsev, 'Neo-feudalism explained'; 'Mif o burokratii: nevernaya problema', *Vedomosti*, 17 Feb. 2010.

⁵⁴ The author is grateful to Silvana Malle for emphasizing this point.

⁵⁵ Pavel Baev, 'Crooked hierarchy and reshuffled networks: reforming Russia's dysfunctional military machine', in Kononenko and Moshes, eds, *Russia as a network state*, esp. pp. 68, 71–3. For similar frictions in big business, see Philip Hanson, 'Networks, cronies and business plans'.

⁵⁶ Medvedev speaking to the meeting of the Russian government, Moscow, 29 Dec. 2010, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/9957>, accessed 9 Jan. 2012.

the President does not coordinate, is coordinated by nobody else', before noting that the system was inadequate and in need of change.⁵⁷

'Manual control' means that the executive leadership is obliged to micro-manage, and to assume the responsibilities of lower-level officials. According to Aleksei Makarkin, deputy president of the Centre for Political Technologies, manual control 'permeates all branches of government': ministers and governors will not act until the president himself 'leads them by the nose' to the problem, mayors and district heads wait for instructions from the governors, and so on down the chain.⁵⁸

Such manual control was exemplified by Medvedev's personal intervention in the Magnitsky case and the delegation of an investigation to the prosecutor general. Prime Minister Putin's personal intervention to address the protests in the town of Pikalevo in summer 2009 is another example, as was his response to the fires in the heatwave a year later. As many noted at the time, Putin's active role provided him with a PR opportunity. Equally, his intervention was a practical demonstration of the need for manual control. Other ministers are dispatched from Moscow to take personal command of local situations as required.

Both the President and Prime Minister have been obliged to establish mechanisms for monitoring the progress of their instructions. Following the summer 2010 fires, Putin ordered the installation in his office of a live-feed video system so that he could keep an eye on the implementation of his instructions about reconstruction of housing. One of the results of the series of meetings Medvedev has chaired on the implementation of presidential instructions is the establishment of an online monitoring system feeding information directly to the president's desk. He has also signed legislation reforming the system for fulfilling orders, and all decisions about granting further extensions on orders which have already been extended three times will now be taken by the president.

By its very nature, manual control works only when the senior official is present—the effect wears off after his departure. As a process, it is inefficient, time-consuming, difficult and potentially dangerous. Such procedures devour the leadership's time, reducing effectiveness and even coherence across a wider range of issues. As one Russian commentator has suggested, when control is exercised from just one agency, it becomes very easy to neutralize.⁵⁹ Despite the live-feed connection, Putin was frustrated with the flawed results of reconstruction efforts.⁶⁰ It remains to be seen how the presidential monitoring mechanism will work. Also, manual control reveals weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the system. It was during one such manual control episode that Alexander Bastrykin, head of the Investigative Committee, while leading the investigation into a terrorist attack on the Nevsky Express train in November 2009, was hospitalized as a result of a secondary attack.

The meaning of the vertical of power, however, has evolved to the extent that some now see it more as a networked group mechanism to eliminate the

⁵⁷ Medvedev cited in Alexandra Samarina, 'Prezident protiv ruchnovo upravleniya', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 8 June 2011. See also Whitmore's discussion in 'The powerless vertical'.

⁵⁸ Aleksei Makarkin, cited in 'Strane nuzhen glas da glaz', *Izvestiya*, 14 Sept. 2010.

⁵⁹ Samarina, 'Prezident protiv'.

⁶⁰ See e.g. Irina Filatova, 'Anti-graft cameras show fields', *Moscow Times*, 13 Aug. 2010.

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negative effects of mistakes and crises for the authorities themselves. Indeed, this returns us to the concept of the team discussed above. This is a version of a 'circle of shared responsibility', a translation of the Russian term *krugovaya poruka*. This circle is an important element of Russian political culture, a network which draws the individual into membership of a larger system in which each looks after the other, acting in a mutually beneficial way and providing protection and mutual aid. At the same time, members are pressured or punished if they break the rules of the group. Such a network contributes to stability and encourages a resistance to change.⁶¹

This returns us to Ryazanova-Clarke's point, noted above, that the vertical of power is a blurred concept: specific agency is often omitted, which obscures the notion of individual responsibility, including that for building or strengthening the vertical. This is especially so for the upper echelons of power, but also for those in the other ranks, for whom the vertical of power is about the ability to formulate reports that will convey the impression of reliability to superiors.⁶² This is emphasized by Inozemtsev's argument that in the vertical as built under Putin, 'at every level of the hierarchy a certain degree of bribery and clientelist parochialism is not only tolerated but presupposed in exchange for unconditional loyalty and a part of the take for one's superiors ... The weak pay tribute up, the strong provide protection down.' As such, the vertical of power works 'in its own way', in that it 'provides a mechanism for the relatively simple conversion of power into money and vice versa'.⁶³

Such an analysis draws attention to the importance of understanding both the resilience of networks, on the one hand, and on the other the inefficiency, even ineffectiveness, in the implementation of tasks, not least as a result of networks being in competition on different, parallel 'verticals'. As such, it may provide a means of understanding the length of tenure of senior figures who, despite regularly swirling rumours, neither resign nor are fired for numerous high-profile scandals.

Conclusions

The announcement that Putin will run for the presidency in 2012 has led many to assume that the tandem arrangement is at an end, and has once again focused attention on Putin himself as a presidential figure combining institutional and personal authority. Such an approach has merit: Putin is, of course, a strong figurehead personality in Russian politics. However, it runs the risk of overlooking both the developments of the last four years and the stated aims of the Russian leadership, and therefore warping our understanding of Russian politics.

The re-emergence of a broadly stable ruling group or leadership team—one that draws together the state and big business and blends formal structures with

⁶¹ For an excellent discussion of this concept, see Alena Ledeneva, 'The genealogy of *Krugovaya Poruka*: forced trust as a feature of Russian political culture', in Ivana Markova, ed., *Trust and democratic transition in post-communist Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶² 'Putin kak chast naroda', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 10 Aug. 2010.

⁶³ Inozemtsev, 'Neo-feudalism explained'.

informal networks—is perhaps the most important development in Russian politics over the last few years. The emergence of the Security Council as a central forum for policy-making is a particularly noteworthy development. This team, incorporating the office of the president, and now, it seems, prime minister, is the core of the structure of power.

This has two major implications. First, it means that any alternative, ‘new’ figures appointed to the most senior positions are most likely be from the same group, rather than representing an outside or opposition influence, providing political continuity through personnel continuity. This supports the view that the analytical horizon should move away from understanding Russian politics in terms of personalized presidential tenures towards a longer evolutionary view.

Moreover, rather than a vertical split between the president and the prime minister, there is a series of horizontal and sometimes diagonal splits between layers of authority, between the leadership above and those who implement policy below. Although any difference is difficult to measure with specific accuracy, it seems that President Medvedev fared little worse in having his orders and instructions implemented than former President Putin, who, despite retaining personal authority during his tenure as prime minister, continued to face problems in having his orders implemented. The vertical of power does not work properly for either Putin or Medvedev—and the prevailing conditions in Russia suggest that it will not work for the president who takes office in 2012.

Indeed, as this article suggests, the failure to establish a working vertical of power—whoever is at the top—is the second notable development in Russian politics over the last few years. As a result, while an agenda can be formulated, the leadership finds it difficult to implement it. How will the Russian leadership address these failures in the aftermath of the parliamentary and presidential elections? Will the reshuffle mentioned by senior figures take place—and will it be a deep reshuffle? Would such a reshuffle have the desired impact?

Such conclusions—and forward-looking questions—point to the need to alter our political vocabulary for Russian politics. Rather than focusing on the tandem, analytical thinking would benefit from once again considering a broader group, a team—a team of rivals, in some cases, perhaps, but nevertheless a team. And while politics may appear highly personalized in Russia, this is in fact because of the failure of the vertical of power and the concomitant necessity for manual control: senior politicians as a result are highly visible as it is they who are implementing policy. In fact, the vertical of power refers less to top-down authoritative control and more to the nature of the team and the political culture of *krugovaya poruka*, a mutually responsible circle undertaking a major task. Such an understanding of the *vertikal* reflects the combination of team and task, and chimes with the aim to establish what Moscow calls a consolidated Russian statehood.

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