

**Panel:** Leadership Transition in Russia: Continuity or Change (Lilac/Tulip)

**Date/Time:** April 26, 2012 / 17:30 – 18:45

**Organizing Institution:** Center for the National Interest

**Talking Points for:** Taehwan Kim  
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### *Beyond Putinism?*

I have the following three points to make for this session.

When we discuss leadership transition in Russia, our starting point should be continuity and change “from what?” – namely, the comparative referent from which to assess continuity or change. I assume that the referent should be the policies and institutions basically forged in Russia under the two terms of the Putin presidency during 2000-2008, followed by the Medvedev intermission. And I would define this complex of elements as ‘Putinism’, which is by no sense a consistent and coherent political ideology, but rather “distinctive mentalities” [Juan Linz 1975]. Among others, I would identify the following four distinctive elements as its defining characteristics: (1) Retreat of democracy and resurgence of authoritarianism as a distinctive political regime type; (2) Emergence of state capitalism as a model of economic development; (3) Deepening dependency on natural resources as a source of economic growth and political governance; and finally, (4) Increasingly assertive external behavior. Based on this definition of Putinism, we are now talking about continuity or change in each of the four elements.

Secondly, of the four elements, I pinpoint Russia’s deepening resource dependency at the core dynamics of Putinism, which has in fact rendered Russia a conventional “rentier state” [Hazem Bablawi and Giacomo Luciani 1986 and Douglas Yates 1996]. To analyze the inner dynamics of Putinism, I argue a particular attention should be paid to (1) the formation of a distinctive dominant coalition under the Putin leadership (2) that has revolved around the two phases of resource rents – namely, rent generation/capture and rent consumption/distribution. My point here is that continuity or change of Russian leadership in the coming years will be determined to a great extent by the amount of resource rents to be generated, by and among whom the rents will be captured, appropriated and distributed, and for what purposes the rents will be consumed.

Finally, based on this logical reasoning, we could project different ‘Russias’ on the spectrum of continuity and change of Putinism, depending on different combinations of rent generation/capture and consumption/distribution. At one extreme, continuity from the old Putinism would prevail unless there were fundamental transformations in the current structure of rent capture and distribution. High crude prices would be favorable to this continuity option.

At the other end of the spectrum would be located a liberal Russia, in which:

- The state monopoly of rent capture gets loose to allow competent and competitive private actors;
- The rents are dissipated more broadly through the competitive process; and
- Russian society as a whole, and the middle class in particular, becomes disillusioned with the paternalistic implicit social contract.

In between the two extremes are, of course, numerous combinations of change and continuity. What would be the most likely combination? It will depend upon the determination of the political leadership to introduce reforms into the current structure of rent capture and distribution and to overcome the political constraints of the dominant political coalition. Political demands for reforms from the Russian society, of course, could be another important source of change. So, will Putin go beyond Putinism?

*\* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.*

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