

## RUSSIA XXI: THE LOGIC OF SUICIDE AND REBIRTH

LILIA SHEVTSOVA

The Russian system, senior associated Lilia Shevtsova writes, is beginning to decay. It cannot sustain the crumbling status quo, nor can it be certain of finding a new incarnation for itself. The only real questions, Lilia Shevtsova argues in her new report, are whether the final stage of demise has already started, and, if so, how long it will last. Yet the system still has some resources, if not to revive itself, then to draw out its death, and that survival instinct could take a nasty, even bloody, form.

### Key Themes

- The system can still try to reproduce itself through regime change and the emergence of a new Leader personifying authoritarian rule. Any new attempt to breathe life into the rotting Matrix will inevitably involve coercion to preserve its power.
- The forces who present themselves as “liberal,” declaring the need to “influence” the system from within and supporting “partial” changes, might try to hijack the protest movement and reestablish personalized power under liberal slogans. However, their attempt would only end up in a new “Putinism.”
- Though only a minority in Russia is willing to publicly stand up for a state based on the rule of law, it is more important that the vast majority of Russians are ready to accept the idea of the new order if it is offered to them.

### Recommendations

**There is no doubt, in Shevtsova’s mind,** that Russia’s moment of truth is fast approaching. The question is whether the confluence of several specific factors will occur in the same timeframe and soon enough. These factors include:

- public pressure on the regime;
- consolidation of the non-system opposition;
- split of the ruling elite, with its pragmatic part joining the opposition;
- power structures’ reluctance to defend the old order; and
- creation by the opposition of a “road map” for the transition that will include Constitutional reform and a new state structure.

**Failure to reach these goals will deepen the rot and/or implosion of the system and the state.** As for the opposition, one key goal it may set for itself is to emerge ready to formulate an agenda that is responsive to the challenges posed by a more repressive regime.

**The fast-paced events and the degradation of the system,** Lilia Shevtsova concludes, may call for some ad hoc changes to the agenda, but one objective remains paramount under any circumstances: the pledge by all participants in the political process to renounce personalized power and to step down from positions of power in case of electoral defeat. This has never happened before in Russian history. If Russia finally manages to do it, it will have reached its “end of history” and the beginning of a new one.

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