

Medvedev Looks More Like the Next President

By [Vladimir Frolov](#)

October 03, 2010

The  **Moscow Times**

The surprising news about Yury Luzhkov's unceremonious dismissal by President Dmitry Medvedev is that it has made Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 somewhat less likely.

With Luzhkov's departure from the political scene, along with the earlier retirements of Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiyev and Bashkortostan President Murtaza Rakhimov, Putin's team has completely consolidated its hold on power, eliminated potential sources of mutiny and is now in perfect position to rule Russia for decades to come.

Moscow's mayor is the third most-powerful position after the president and the prime minister in terms of raw economic, financial and electoral power. If not properly controlled, he who runs Moscow could very well run the country.

As mayor, Luzhkov was endowed with an outsized ego that was matched only by his ambition.

He clearly had never been just another brick in the vertical power wall and often allowed himself considerable political leeway. When Putin was president, he had a direct line to him, bypassing the Kremlin administration. His flamboyant “I’ll be back” style of departure only confirmed the suspicion that he had indeed been a dormant threat.

Putin’s team now has complete control of the country. For the most part, the titles of prime minister and president are irrelevant since Putin retains ultimate power.

In this sense, the political annihilation of Luzhkov may suggest that Putin is leaning toward maintaining the tandemocracy after 2012, letting Medvedev run for a second term, while remaining prime minister for a while. This is what Putin hinted at in August in his wide-ranging interview to Kommersant when he said he was tired of foreign policy and liked what he was doing as prime minister.

Were Putin to pass the 2012 deadline, it would mean that he would not be returning to the presidency again, barring some catastrophic event. Because the presidential vote in 2012 would be his only window of opportunity, it appears that he has other plans and other options.

When Medvedev serves out his second presidential term in 2018, another member of Putin’s team will step forward to take the reins of power, but with Putin still having the last word on crucial decisions.

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