

Medvedev Has Lost His 2012 Bid

By [Vladimir Frolov](#)

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Earlier this year, I argued on these pages that the continued uncertainty from the ruling tandem over which member was going to run for president was undermining the political stability that the tandem justifiably viewed as their key achievement and hampering long-term economic growth.

I further argued that the best option for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev was to quickly announce that they would maintain the tandem arrangement into Medvedev's second presidential term. It seemed at that time a no-brainer. All other options looked bad, including Putin's return to the Kremlin or Medvedev's ouster by a third candidate nominated by Putin.

Theoretically, this option is still on the table as long as no tandem member has announced his candidacy. Many in the West still hope and pray that this is what will happen in December. But it won't.

The window of opportunity for this closed in early May, the day Putin announced the creation

of his All-Russia People's Front. It was a clear sign that he was laying the political groundwork to justify and ensure his return to the Kremlin in 2012.

Medvedev's liberal advisers have arrogantly sought to frame his second term and his program for modernization as a repudiation of Putin and his system of "managed democracy," labeling Putin's so-called stability as "stagnation." This raised the specter of a Mikhail Gorbachev-style unraveling of the country with Medvedev's Kremlin losing control as it pushed for faster political liberalization during his second term despite insufficient public support.

One of Medvedev's mistakes was not to distance himself from radical proposals from his advisers, particularly from the Institute for Contemporary Development think tank. These include dismantling Russia's security services and adopting a subservient pro-Western foreign policy. Medvedev's own public statements beginning in May have also indicated his willingness to push for deep political changes during his second term, including significant easing of registration procedures for political parties and opening the door to return direct popular elections for governors. In foreign policy, some of Medvedev's actions, such as Russia's mediation efforts in Libya and discussions with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on the future of Transdnestr, have also raised eyebrows.

Medvedev's advisers have cast him as a Boris Yeltsin-style destroyer of Putin's system, while in fact all he needed to do was to run as a Chinese Communist Party incremental modernizer. By the time Medvedev realized that, as he made it clear during his May news conference, it was already too late. Putin could no longer trust Medvedev with continuing his cause.

It is a sign of despair in Medvedev's camp that some of his advisers are now calling upon him to openly challenge Putin and declare his presidential candidacy at the Yaroslavl Global Policy Forum in September.

The strategy is to pre-empt Putin and force him into a position where he has to either endorse Medvedev as his own choice for president or repudiate his protege with public arguments why Medvedev did not live up to Putin's expectations and, thus, does not deserve to serve a second term. But Putin would never challenge Medvedev openly because this risks an all-out war of the elites.

If this strategy doesn't work, Medvedev might be urged to throw a Hail Mary pass and exercise his constitutional right to fire Putin before Medvedev loses this power six months before the presidential vote.

Medvedev would be wise to ignore this self-serving advice to become another Yeltsin or former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko. Instead, he should focus on finding the right political role to continue his modernization agenda in another capacity. This might help him return to the main political stage, perhaps as a contender in the 2018 or 2024 presidential race.

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