

No One, Not Even Kudrin, Is Irreplaceable

By [The Moscow Times](#)

September 27, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

President Dmitry Medvedev had no choice but to fire Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin.

Kudrin, who had served as guardian of the nation's finances since 2000, drew the president's wrath when he defiantly declared that he would not work in a Cabinet led by Medvedev. Making matters worse, Kudrin balked on national television Monday when Medvedev demanded his resignation during a government session, saying he needed to consult with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin first.

What prompted Kudrin's open defiance is unclear. Speculation that he jealously sought the prime minister's post for himself clashes with his reputation as a meek fiscal policy expert who preferred to crunch numbers than seek personal glory. Kudrin said in his resignation letter that he felt uncomfortable with the fiscal risks that the government was taking and that he had first tried to quit in February.

It is easy to feel suspicious that the Kudrin scandal is little more than a show, part of a wily plan by Kremlin powerbrokers to accomplish some unknown goal. We could be forgiven for

such cynicism after Medvedev revealed last weekend that his presidency essentially amounted to a charade, a plan concocted by him and Putin back in 2007 under which they would swap jobs in 2012.

But Kudrin did undermine Medvedev publicly — so the president had to act. Two basic laws of the workplace are discipline and subordination, as Medvedev rightfully pointed out when he scolded Kudrin on Monday, saying, “Such statements appear improper ... and can in no way be justified. Nobody has revoked discipline and subordination.”

If Medvedev had let Kudrin’s remarks pass unpunished, he could have faced a mutiny in the ranks. His lame duck status as president would have been worsened by complete disdain from government officials, who would have realized that they, too, could undermine the president and escape retribution.

Kudrin’s dismissal is an unwelcome development for foreign investors, who have counted on his fiscal conservatism to keep the economy stable. But investors also know that no individual is irreplaceable, whether in a company or the government — a notion that Medvedev and Putin should also bear in mind as they look to extend their reign into the next six years.

A characteristic of a good leader is the ability to develop a strong team that can work independently. Kudrin assembled such a team, and we can hope that it will be allowed to continue to guide the government’s finances with integrity.

At the same time, it is important that the next finance minister is given the ability to constructively challenge populist, fiscally irresponsible policies that pose a serious threat to Russia’s economy. Another yes-man in the Cabinet is the last thing Russia needs.

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