

U.S. Intelligence Official Says Russia Likely to Face Greater Political Strain

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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WASHINGTON — The top U.S. intelligence official said Tuesday that President Vladimir Putin faces greater political challenges than ever before.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told lawmakers Tuesday that he expects the Russian political system to come under more strain in the next year because of social discontent.

In his annual assessment of global threats to the United States, Clapper said in prepared testimony that Putin's crackdown on opposition after he returned to the presidency last year has helped the Kremlin reassert control. But the aggressive approach has also led to growing public dissatisfaction.

"Important sectors of the Russian public are frustrated with the country's sluggish economy and are no longer content with a political system that lacks any real pluralism and suffers

from poor and arbitrary governance and endemic corruption," Clapper said. "All these factors present Putin with far greater challenges than any he faced during his two previous terms in office."

Despite rising tensions between Russia and the United States, Clapper said Putin is still willing to cooperate with the United States on some U.S. interests, including stabilizing Afghanistan. However, Russia is unlikely to continue supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan if the U.S. seeks to keep troops there past 2014 without a mandate from the United Nations, he said.

As a centerpiece of a push to expand cooperation with Russia, U.S. President Barack Obama has sought to negotiate further cuts to the U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals. But Clapper noted that Russia still sees its nuclear forces as the most important part of its defense capabilities, because its conventional forces have been in decline since the end of the Cold War. This emphasis is unlikely to change until investments aimed at modernizing those forces bear fruit.

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