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ANALYSIS

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PUTIN'S POTENTIAL SUCCESSORS PART 2: Aleksey Dyumin

Executive Summary

Vladimir Putin is in his [fourth](#) term as Russia's president, having held the role for (a noncontinuous) 18 years. Russia's next presidential election cycle is in 2024, and while Putin has amended the [constitution](#) to permit his rule until he is 84, [speculations](#) continue to circulate regarding his declining health at 70 years old. Moreover, as [domestic](#) and [international](#) pressure continues to mount on Putin over a year into Russia's war against Ukraine, Putin's longevity as the Federation's president is a key topic of interest for the international community. This report forms the second part of Insikt Group's investigation into potential Russian government candidates who are well-positioned to be the next leader of Russia, and focuses on Aleksey Dyumin, the current governor of Tula and Putin's former aide-de-camp (*адъютант*).

Dyumin would very likely be a leading candidate should Putin decide to choose a successor. His personal loyalty to Putin, good relations with members of the Russian elite, successful completion of strategically important tasks in Ukraine, and effective leadership in Tula have established the former aide-de-camp as a strong contender for the presidency.^{1 2 3} However, Dyumin's strained relations with defense minister Sergei Shoigu and the Russian military in general likely impedes his candidacy relative to Insikt Group's assessed most-likely candidate for succession, [Sergei Kirienko](#).⁴ To strengthen his bid, Dyumin very likely would need to improve his relations with the Russian military to ensure that his appointment as the Tsesarevich would not cause a conflict within the siloviki faction.^{5 6}

Dyumin's policies and actions as a member of the siloviki faction and the governor of Tula suggest that a Dyumin presidency would very likely preserve Putin's political system. Domestically and internationally, Dyumin would likely continue Putin's policies, given his career in the Russian Federal Protective Service (FSO), the Russian Defense Ministry, and his role in annexing Crimea. However, any candidate chosen by Putin would also likely seek to improve relations with the West.

¹ [https://verstka\[.\]media/protivniki-shoygu-lobbiruyut-dyumina](https://verstka[.]media/protivniki-shoygu-lobbiruyut-dyumina)

² [https://www.vesti\[.\]ru/finance/article/1537170](https://www.vesti[.]ru/finance/article/1537170)

³ [https://meduza\[.\]io/feature/2016/02/03/vratar-kotoryy-propuskaet-shayby-putina](https://meduza[.]io/feature/2016/02/03/vratar-kotoryy-propuskaet-shayby-putina)

⁴ [https://meduza\[.\]io/feature/2022/10/04/kadyrov-i-prigozhin-regulyarno-i-podozritelno-sinhronno-kritikuyut-rossiyskuyu-armiyu-chego-oni-dobivayutsya](https://meduza[.]io/feature/2022/10/04/kadyrov-i-prigozhin-regulyarno-i-podozritelno-sinhronno-kritikuyut-rossiyskuyu-armiyu-chego-oni-dobivayutsya)

⁵ The siloviki faction includes current and former members of the law and security structures who wield significant power in Russian politics.

⁶ Tsesarevich is a term used to describe the heir apparent in Imperial Russia.

Key Findings

- Dyumin's close and personal relationships with Putin and other members of the Russian political and business elite very likely set him up to be accepted by key stakeholders should he be selected as a presidential successor.
- Dyumin's successful tenure in FSO, the Defense Ministry, and as governor in Tula establish him as a capable leader, increasing his attractiveness as a potential successor to Putin.
- Dyumin's strained relationship with Shoigu, and by extension the Russian military, likely weakens his bid for succession as Putin likely will seek to select a candidate who will appease the majority of the siloviki faction.
- Dyumin's actions as the head of Special Operation Forces (SOF) and the governor of Tula suggest that a potential Dyumin presidency would preserve Putin's political system and continue similar foreign policy objectives.

Dyumin's Relationship with Putin and Russian Elites

The most compelling argument in favor of Dyumin's candidacy is his close and personal relationship with Putin, described as a "trusting relationship" by Russian independent news outlet Verstka.⁷ According to Dyumin, their relationship dates back to August 9, 1999, Putin's first day as acting prime minister of Russia. At the time, Dyumin worked for the FSO, which among other things is responsible for providing security to high-ranking Russian government officials. Since then and until 2007, Dyumin served as Putin's personal bodyguard. From 2008 to 2012, when Putin temporarily relinquished the presidency to Dmitry Medvedev, Dyumin served as Putin's aide-de-camp, spending a significant amount of time in close proximity to Putin. Throughout this time, Dyumin accompanied Putin to the frontlines in the Second Chechen War, ensured Putin's security during hunting trips, and even protected Putin from a bear during a camping trip.^{8 9 10} In the 13 years of ensuring Putin's safety and security, Dyumin almost certainly developed a close and personal relationship with Putin, evident from Dyumin's career rise and Putin's public statements regarding Dyumin.

As is the case with most of Putin's [friends](#), Dyumin was quickly rewarded for developing a "trusting relationship" with Putin. After Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, Dyumin's career rapidly advanced. First, Dyumin was promoted to deputy head of presidential security within FSO in 2012.¹¹ In 2013, Dyumin became the [head](#) of the SOF of the Russian Armed Forces, during which he oversaw the evacuation of Viktor Yanukovich, the former president of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, and the protection of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.^{12 13} In 2015, Dyumin was [promoted](#) twice in a single year,

⁷ [https://verstka\[.\]media/protivniki-shoygu-lobbiruyut-dyumina](https://verstka[.]media/protivniki-shoygu-lobbiruyut-dyumina)

⁸ [https://www.kommersant\[.\]ru/doc/136896](https://www.kommersant[.]ru/doc/136896)

⁹ [https://www.kommersant\[.\]ru/doc/136896](https://www.kommersant[.]ru/doc/136896)

¹⁰ [https://www.kommersant\[.\]ru/doc/2911780#:~:text=%D0%98%20%D0%B5%D1%89%D0%B5%20%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0,%D1%87%D1%82%D0%BE%20%D0%BE%D0%BD%20%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D1%82...](https://www.kommersant[.]ru/doc/2911780#:~:text=%D0%98%20%D0%B5%D1%89%D0%B5%20%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B0,%D1%87%D1%82%D0%BE%20%D0%BE%D0%BD%20%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B6%D0%B5%D1%82...)

¹¹ [https://newstula\[.\]ru/fn_843800.html](https://newstula[.]ru/fn_843800.html)

¹² [https://www.kommersant\[.\]ru/doc/2906839](https://www.kommersant[.]ru/doc/2906839)

¹³ [https://rus.azattyq\[.\]org/a/27540364.html](https://rus.azattyq[.]org/a/27540364.html)

first becoming the commander of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, and later the Deputy Defense Minister of Russia. In 2016, Dyumin was [appointed](#) as interim governor of Tula, and was later elected for the position twice, holding it to this day.



Figure 1: Dyumin (left) serving as Putin's bodyguard in 2000 (Source: NewTimes¹⁴)

In 2016, following Dyumin's appointment as interim governor of Tula, he publicly demonstrated the strength of his relationship with Putin when he hosted Putin and Alexander Beglov, then-Presidential Plenipotentiary to Russia in the Central Federal District, in Leo Tolstoy's estate in Yasnaya Polyana.¹⁵ This visit was notable for several reasons beyond the honor of hosting Putin and his delegation, some of which have been revealed only years after the event. For example, the visit emphasized Putin's approval of Dyumin to his post in Tula, a region that hosts a majority of Russia's weapons-producing factories and thus is strategically significant for the Russian Federation. In addition, Beglov went on to

¹⁴ [https://newtimes\[.\]ru/articles/detail/107458](https://newtimes[.]ru/articles/detail/107458)

¹⁵ [https://www.kommersant\[.\]ru/amp/3083952](https://www.kommersant[.]ru/amp/3083952)

become the governor of St. Petersburg, Putin's hometown.¹⁶ During the tour of the house, Putin gave Dyumin campaign advice: "Don't scare a falcon with a crow" (Не пугай сокола вороной), comparing Dyumin to a falcon, a rare compliment from the president and also likely a message addressed to Tula residents and elite underlining Putin's support for Dyumin. More recently, in a March 2023 award ceremony dedicated to International Women's Day, Putin publicly said that Dyumin gifted him a "Tolstoy shirt", and that Putin planned to wear it in reference to their 2016 visit. Putin rarely publicly discloses receiving gifts from members of the Russian elite, further indicating the close relationship between the two politicians.¹⁷

Friendship with Putin very likely enabled Dyumin to develop close relationships with Putin's friends and other members of the Russian elite, which would strengthen his candidacy to succeed Putin and provide him with the necessary support from important Russian stakeholders. These relationships primarily developed through a shared interest in hockey. Dyumin played in the Night Hockey League from 2011 to 2019, which boasted the participation of Putin and members of Putin's inner circle, including Shoigu, head of Rosneft Igor Sechin, as well as longtime Putin friends and allies the Rotenberg brothers and Gennady Timchenko.^{18 19 20 21} Between 2012 and 2014, Dyumin served as Timchenko's adviser at the SKA Hockey Club, a Gazprom-sponsored team whose senior managers include Timchenko himself and Roman Rotenberg, the son of Boris Rotenberg.²² Dyumin also almost certainly developed close relationships with other members of the Russian elite throughout his career, both in the Ministry of Defense and as governor of Tula.

Dyumin's Tenure as Head of SOF and Governor of Tula

In addition to a good relationship with Putin and other Russian elites, Dyumin's candidacy is almost certainly strengthened by his successes as the head of the SOF and governor of Tula. Dyumin proved his effectiveness as the head of the SOF, where he was instrumental in organizing and carrying out the successful evacuation of Viktor Yanukovych, the former president of Ukraine, who was pro-Russian and currently resides in exile in Russia. As head of the SOF, Dyumin was also essential in the annexation of Crimea and in ensuring safety during the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.²³ For his part in annexing Crimea, Dyumin was [awarded](#) the Hero of Russia award. In 2017, Dyumin denied his involvement in Ukraine, likely to avoid disclosing classified information, though he did acknowledge that he received the award for "completing a special task".²⁴

¹⁶ <http://en.kremlin.ru/acts/news/58710>

¹⁷ <https://tula.bezformata.com/listnews/dyumina-i-poluchil-priglasenie-v-yasnuyu/115011717/>

¹⁸ Boris and Arkady Rotenberg are close, childhood [friends](#) of Putin. The 3 men met during Judo classes. Gennady Timchenko is Putin's close friend. According to [Putin](#), the 2 met in the 1990's in Saint Petersburg, though there are [claims](#) that Putin and Timchenko met during their time in the KGB.

¹⁹ <https://gazetaby.com/post/uverennyj-v-sebe-dyadka-kak-govoryat-budushhij-nas/155807/>

²⁰ Night Hockey League is an amateur hockey league, where Putin plays hockey with his friends and retired professional hockey players.

²¹ In 2020, the match was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Dyumin did not attend the 2021 match. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, Putin has also stopped playing in the Night Hockey League.

²² <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2906721>

²³ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2906839>

²⁴ <https://www.vesti.ru/finance/article/1537170>

Dyumin also very likely proved himself as a talented and successful governor in Tula. After his appointment as governor by Putin, Dyumin was re-elected for the position twice, [remaining](#) the only former FSO officer-turned-governor to successfully lead his region and get re-elected.²⁵ His success in Tula is almost certainly due to the region's excellent economic performance. Under Dyumin, Tula became the fourth top-rated region in attracting investment, behind only Moscow, Moscow oblast, and Tatarstan.²⁶ Prior to Dyumin's arrival in Tula, the region was only tenth in investment rating primarily through investments into Tula's manufacturing industry.²⁷ ²⁸ Dyumin's economic successes in Tula present him as a talented leader capable of improving the economy, especially as the Russian government experiences economic challenges due to its war against Ukraine and corresponding international sanctions.



Figure 2: A mosaic portrait of Putin, Shoigu, Kostiukov, Vitko, Gerasimov, Dyumin, Lavrov, and Volodin at the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces. The mosaic was removed following a statement by Putin that “Someday grateful descendants will appreciate our merits, but now it is too early to do so”. (Source: RBC²⁹)

As governor of Tula, Dyumin plays a key role in sustaining Russia's military-industrial complex. The region hosts numerous large defense enterprises on which the military relies heavily.³⁰ As Russia continues to suffer enormous equipment losses in Ukraine, the responsibility falls on Dyumin to ensure that weapons-producing companies in his region can meet the demand of the Russian military. And as

²⁵ 4 former FSO officers were promoted as governors of different regions. These are Dyumin - governor of Tula; Dmitry Mironov - former governor of Yaroslavl (2016-2021); Sergey Morozov - governor of Astrakhan (2018-2019); and Evgeny Zinichev - governor of Kaliningrad (2016). Zinichev was later appointed as Minister for Emergency Situations and died in a freak accident in 2021.

²⁶ https://asi.ru/government_officials/rating/

²⁷ <https://cpkr.ru/issledovaniya/gubernatory-novoy-volny/aleksey-dyumin-otzyvchivyy-silovik/>

²⁸ https://asi.ru/government_officials/rating/

²⁹ <https://www.rbc.ru/society/26/04/2020/5ea5a08a9a79471ca93d3d02>

³⁰ <https://verstka.media/protivniki-shoygu-lobbiruyut-dyumina/>

Denis Manturov, the minister of industry and trade, continues to face hardships in increasing weapons production to meet the demand created by the war, rumors of Dyumin's eventual promotion to Manturov's position continue to grow.³¹

Dyumin's Strained Relationship with Shoigu

Dyumin's candidacy for the position of Putin's successor is likely impeded by the allegedly strained relationship between Dyumin and Shoigu, who enjoys a close relationship with Putin as well.^{32 33} In December 2015, prior to his appointment in Tula, Dyumin was promoted to the position of Deputy Defense Minister of Russia with a portfolio on medicine, construction, and troop housing.³⁴ According to Russian media outlet The New Times, Dyumin was sent to the Defense Ministry as Putin's spy on the military.³⁵ While this position immediately decreased Dyumin's popularity with Shoigu and the military in general, it also further showed Dyumin as someone who is trusted by Putin. Russian-language media outlet Meduza and Russian state-sponsored outlet RIA Novosti claimed that Shoigu was wary of Dyumin replacing him given Dyumin's sudden rise in the Russian military. He then lobbied for Dyumin's appointment to Tula, which he was appointed to only 3 months after assuming the Deputy Defense Minister role.^{36 37} Since then, the Russian media has often mentioned Dyumin as a potential replacement for Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.³⁸

The rumors about a strained relationship between Shoigu and Dyumin have increased since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine and amid the poor performance of the Russian military. In October 2022, as pressure mounted on the Russian military, members of the "war party," specifically Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Russian oligarch Evgeny Prigozhin, began heavily criticizing the Russian military and, by extension, Shoigu. According to Meduza, Kadyrov and Prigozhin enjoyed Dyumin's support in criticizing Shoigu, which reflects that Dyumin is likely interested in weakening Shoigu's position.

³¹ <https://t.me/svobodnieslova/1240>

³² <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/04/kadyrov-i-prigozhin-regulyarno-i-podozritelno-sinhronno-kritikuyut-rossiyskuyu-armiyu-chego-oni-dobivayutsya>

³³ <https://www.svoboda.org/a/31163798.html>

³⁴ https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2016/02/02_a_8054219.shtml

³⁵ <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/107458>

³⁶ <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/10/04/kadyrov-i-prigozhin-regulyarno-i-podozritelno-sinhronno-kritikuyut-rossiyskuyu-armiyu-chego-oni-dobivayutsya>

³⁷ <https://ria.ru/20160203/1369134677.html>

³⁸ <https://t.me/svobodnieslova/790>

Outlook

In a scenario in which Putin selects his successor, Dyumin's loyalty to Putin, his success in achieving historic strategic goals in Ukraine, as well as effective managerial skills makes him one of the top choices. However, Dyumin's unpopularity with the Russian military and Shoigu likely decreases his chances of being selected as the next president by Putin, who almost certainly values unity and relative peace within the military and the siloviki faction. Thus, for Dyumin, improving his standing with the Russian military is critical to strengthen a potential bid for the presidency.

Dyumin's current and former experience provides insight into how he would likely approach the presidential office. Like Putin, Dyumin is a member of the siloviki faction, and this experience would almost certainly define his presidency. Under Dyumin, Russia would be unlikely to experience major structural and political changes. In foreign policy, Dyumin would likely pursue a more peaceful version of Putin's: while Dyumin would likely not pursue kinetic conflict with Russia's neighbors and adversaries, he would very likely continue hybrid warfare tactics, specifically cyber and information operations to achieve Russia's geopolitical goals.

An upcoming Insikt Group report will evaluate Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's chances to be selected as Putin's successor. Other potential candidates to succeed Putin, with various likelihoods, include Sergei Sobianin, the mayor of Moscow, and Sergei Korolev, the first deputy director of the FSB.^{39 40 41}

³⁹ <https://www.mos.ru/en/mayor/biography/>

⁴⁰ <https://raamoprusland.nl/dossiers/kremlin/1821-korolev-s-coronation-and-the-rise-of-the-ruthless-in-the-fsb>

⁴¹ <http://premier.gov.ru/biography/>

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