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## WHO'S WHO IN THE 1995 RUSSIAN ELECTIONS

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### INTRODUCTION

On December 17, 1995, over 100,000,000 Russians are expected to go to the polls and vote for 450 members of the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament, or Federal Assembly. Half the members will be elected from winner-take-all single-mandate electoral districts.<sup>1</sup> The other half will be elected from party lists in proportion to their total national vote, with 5 percent the minimum threshold for party representation.

Under the Russian constitution, the State Duma's power is limited in favor of the presidency. The Duma, therefore, has little say in formulating government policy. However, the upcoming election will reveal the balance of political forces in Russia, and its results will be difficult for President Boris Yeltsin and his administration to ignore. Moreover, some Russian experts view the parliamentary elections as a primary that will indicate popular support for candidates in the presidential election planned for June 1996. The Duma elections undoubtedly will have a significant impact on Russian policy, both foreign and domestic.

According to the Russian Justice Ministry, 262 political parties have been registered, and by the end of September 1995, 63 electoral blocs and alliances had been recorded by the Central Electoral Commission. A large majority of the parties running for the State Duma are tiny, with no solid base of national support. By October 22, 1995, only 42 had managed to submit the 200,000 supporter signatures required in order to begin their electoral campaigns. Approximately 5,500 candidates are on the party lists, and 2,691 are running in the single-mandate constituencies.

Despite the number of parties in this race, the Russian public is largely indifferent. Feeling deceived by the politicians, people are disillusioned and openly skeptical about the value of the elections. Few voters study and compare party platforms, much less attend political rallies. Polls show that people would rather vote for well-known personalities, such as movie actors, military figures,

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1 In these districts, only 25 percent of eligible voters have to take part in the vote. With over 30 candidates competing, the smallest pluralities will be sufficient to win.

and cultural icons. Almost all parties have such luminaries among the top three names on the party lists. In the top twelve electoral blocs alone, there are three actors and four generals.

Opinion polls also show that less than 39 percent of young people (ages 18-24) are going to vote, versus 71 percent in the 67-89 age group. The great strength of the communists is that their voters (primarily age 55 and older) have a high turnout rate. The Communist Party is highly motivated to return to power now, before its electoral base vanishes. With economic issues and populist and nationalist slogans dominating the rhetoric, and only a 25 percent turnout required, it is little wonder that the election results may favor the nationalist and leftist parties.

Based on the latest public opinion polls, the expected results for those on the party lists are as follows:

- ☞ Communists, 10-15 percent;
- ☞ *Yabloko*, 10 percent;
- ☞ Women of Russia, 10 percent;
- ☞ Agrarian Party, 7-10 percent;
- ☞ Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Zhirinovskiy), 7 percent;
- ☞ Russia's Democratic Choice, 5-7 percent;
- ☞ Congress of Russian Communities—KRO (Lebed, Skokov), 5-7 percent.

## **PARTIES, PERSONALITIES, AND PROGRAMS**

What follows is a sketch of the main contenders in the coming electoral race. As the field is crowded, only those parties which currently appear most likely to exceed the 5 percent threshold of the national vote, or which have platforms of particular interest, are discussed.

### **Russia's Democratic Choice-United Democrats**

Forecasts predict that Russia's Democratic Choice could get from 5 to 7 percent of the votes in December. This bloc strongly advocates freedom and democracy, private property, free-market economics, the rule of law, anti-inflationary and stabilization measures, and democratic military reform. Although it opposes Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's view that "the stage of liberal reforms is over," Russia's Democratic Choice generally supports the economic policies of the government.

Former First Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, who heads the party in the Duma, is this bloc's leader. Internationally known human rights advocate Sergei Kovalev is in second place on the party's electoral list. Lydia Fedoseyeva-Shukshina, widow of writer and actor Vassily Shukshin, is in third place. The bloc includes a number of different parties: Gaidar's Russia's Choice, with its nearly 60 regional chapters throughout Russia; the Social Democracy Party headed by Mikhail Gorbachev's chief ideologist, Alexander N. Yakovlev; and the Peasants' Party led by Federation Council (upper chamber of parliament) member Yuri Chernichenko.

Russia's Democratic Choice finds itself in a difficult situation. The left-wing and nationalist opposition, as well as some government officials, attributes all failures of the reforms to Gaidar and his party. Gaidar has never openly distanced himself from the errors made by his government or by his successor, current Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin. Now his unwillingness to attack the government could cost him votes. His supporters are mainly young and middle-aged intellectuals and businessmen who have become unhappy with the government's overregulation and inability to protect them from crime and corruption.

## **Forward, Russia**

Duma member and former Finance Minister Boris Fedorov is first on the party list of Forward, Russia. Second comes Bella Denisenko, formerly a Russia's Choice activist and Deputy Health Minister, followed by Alexander Vladislavlev, a technocrat and former vice president of the centrist Civic Union under Arkady Volsky in 1993. Until he was removed recently by stockholders, Vladislavlev was the CEO of Moscow's failing ZIL automotive plant.

Fedorov is a constant critic of the government. He opposes new International Monetary Fund loans and credits to Russia, fearing that they will only increase Russia's already very high foreign debt. He favors tax reform, including a reduction in the tax burden, deep cuts in government spending, and downsizing of the federal bureaucracy. Private land ownership is one of Forward, Russia's top priorities.

Fedorov's stand on expanding NATO to include Eastern European countries such as Poland and Hungary is unique. He insists that Russia should announce its intention to join NATO because the West's response would indicate its true attitude. He also feels that NATO membership is needed to strengthen Russian democracy. Nevertheless, he is strongly opposed to the expansion of NATO without Russia.

Fedorov's movement is an "inside-the-Beltway" phenomenon, with little support in the Russian regions (*oblasts*). Some members have left and joined Chernomyrdin's pro-government Our Home Is Russia party. Fedorov lacks a team of prominent politicians and public personalities to ensure name recognition for his movement. The expectation is that he will find it difficult to attain the 5 percent of national votes required to attain seats in the Duma, although he is campaigning aggressively.

## **Yabloko (Apple)**

The *Yabloko* bloc is named for its three founders: Grigory Yavlinsky, Yuri Boldyrev, and Vladimir Lukin. In the fall of 1995 Boldyrev dropped out because of political differences with Yavlinsky and other members of the bloc. The *Yabloko* list today includes Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Vladimir Lukin<sup>2</sup> in second place, with Duma member Tatiana Yarygina in the number three slot.

The *Yabloko* bloc is headed by Grigory Yavlinsky. A relatively young, energetic, and extremely ambitious political contender, Yavlinsky is the most popular politician in Russia. His sole rival is General Alexander Lebed of the Congress of Russian Communities (KRO) movement. Unlike Gaidar and Fedorov, Yavlinsky was never a member of the reformist government which imposed so many unpopular measures on the population, and he never fails to criticize the government and its errors. His name is associated with the famous "500 Days" program of radical reform which was shelved by Gorbachev in 1990 under pressure from the orthodox communists. Because of this, Yavlinsky enjoys the image of a prophet shunned by his country.

Yavlinsky claims that his party represents the interests of the middle class—engineers, scientists, teachers, and qualified workers. These social strata have been losers under the reforms. His political platform is a combination of center-right and social-democratic slogans. On the one hand, he calls for private property and the protection of individuals against bureaucratic rule. On the other hand, he insists on increased government involvement in education and health.

*Yabloko* committed some minor violations of the complicated regulations when submitting the party list to the Central Electoral Commission (as did many other electoral blocs) and was denied registration in November 1995. The case went to the Supreme Court, and the Commission's deci-

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2 Lukin has been Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev's archrival.

sion was reversed one week later, but not before the uproar had generated a great deal of publicity in *Yabloko*'s favor. Partly because of this publicity, the party's chances for success are high: It could be the only democratic party to draw support in low double-digit figures. The question is how disciplined its voters will be on election day. In some single-mandate constituencies, other democratic parties have withdrawn their candidates in favor of *Yabloko* nominees.

### **Democratic Russia-Free Trade Unions**

The Democratic Russia bloc was formed on the basis of Russia's oldest democratic organization, which emerged as an anti-Soviet and anti-communist entity in 1990. Its co-chairmen are Galina Starovoitova, former advisor to President Yeltsin, and Duma members Lev Ponomarev and Father Gleb Yakunin. Democratic Russia used to be part of Russia's Choice but left because of Gaidar's loyalty to the government. The party remains a stronghold of anti-communist and anti-totalitarian politicians, most of whom suffered during the Soviet regime as dissidents or prisoners of conscience.

Having failed to reach an electoral agreement with Yavlinsky or Gaidar, Democratic Russia is united in the campaign with the Russian Labor Confederation, which includes a dozen free trade unions and the Shield Military Union. The latter opposes the Defense Ministry's failing policies. The main objective of the bloc is "to awaken the electorate disillusioned by bureaucracy." Its electoral campaign will focus on criticizing the neo-communist *nomenklatura* and its anti-popular economic policies and corruption.

Democratic Russia ran into difficulties registering with the Central Electoral Commission and withdrew in the fall of 1995. On the national lists, the party has chosen to support *Yabloko*, but its leaders intend to run independently in the single-mandate constituencies.

### **Economic Freedom Party**

Led by Konstantin Borovoy, one of the best-known entrepreneurs in Russia, this party's platform is based on the slogan "protecting investors' rights." The party consistently champions free-market economics and deregulation and is openly anti-government. The Moscow regional list is headed by libertarian dissident Valeria Novodvorskaya, who was involved in anti-government activities in the former Soviet Union and was the only dissident detained during the "liberal" Gorbachev era. Borovoy's and Novodvorskaya's behavior and declarations, such as calling the current Russian government "fascist," often shock the public. Because it is primarily Moscow-based and has little support nationally, the Economic Freedom Party is unlikely to surpass the 5 percent threshold.

## **CENTRIST PARTIES AND BLOCS**

### **Our Home Is Russia (*Nash Dom Rossiya*—NDR)**

This bloc, headed by Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, was created on Yeltsin's initiative to provide an alternative to extremist forces on the left and right. It represents the interests of the post-Soviet *nomenklatura*, which is working to retain its political power and acquire wealth through privatization. Our Home Is Russia essentially represents Russia's current status quo and has much to lose if defeated. Virtually all government resources are at its disposal, and most ministers and local governors are members.

This bloc favors further reforms but fails to follow a truly democratic pattern. Chernomyrdin openly advocates "strengthening the role of the government in the regulation of all spheres of Russian life." He also suggests that the government tackle social problems. The NDR is determined to "fight the forces striving to undermine the constitutional basis of the state, abolish the presidency and redistribute property."

Chernomyrdin has chosen Nikita Mikhalkov, a popular movie actor, as number two on the NDR list. Number three is General Lev Rokhlin, commander of the Russian forces that captured Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, in February 1995. NDR lists are being formed in all of Russia's 89 regions. The government-run media are singing its praises, and the massive campaign is yielding results. Though formed only recently, the NDR is fourth in the polls at 12-15 percent, following the communists, *Yabloko*, and Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrats.

The government is already taking costly populist steps, including wage hikes, subsidy increases, and unrestrained lending, to solidify the NDR's position for the upcoming elections. The party is gambling that the inevitable inflation caused by these measures will set in only after the elections.

### **Ivan Rybkin's Electoral Bloc**

This bloc is headed by and named for Ivan Rybkin, Speaker of the State Duma and former head of the pro-Communist Agrarian Party (profiled below). Currently led by Ivan Lapshin, the Agrarians favor a strong state role in agriculture. Rybkin's bloc emerged as part of Yeltsin's attempt to create two broad, centrist parties within the existing establishment, one of which (the NDR) would be pro-government and the other of which would play the part of "loyal opposition." However, it did not take long for federal and local officials and bureaucrats to grasp the advantages of Chernomyrdin's NDR. Therefore, most of them joined the NDR instead of Rybkin's bloc. Moreover, Rybkin's failure to be sufficiently critical of government policy cost him the support of his own Agrarian Party.

Two small parties that had joined the bloc initially—the United Industrial Party and the Federation of Independent Trade Unions—left to run an independent campaign. Three top figures on Rybkin's initial party list—Afghan War hero and former Deputy Defense Minister General Boris Gromov, well-known economist Stanislav Shatalin, and a popular singer named Yosif Kobzon—also defected because of Rybkin's failure to oppose the government.

Rybkin's platform is not captivating the electorate. It calls for social justice, law, order, creativity, and realism, mirroring the slogans of the NDR. However, Rybkin's charisma and perceived common sense could still attract the electorate to vote for him personally. His standing has been improving, partly because of mistakes by his opponents and partly because of his increased criticism of the government. However, despite recent gains, the question of whether Rybkin can make the 5 percent threshold remains open.

## **THE LEFT**

### **Communist Party of the Russian Federation**

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), headed by longtime Soviet Communist Party *apparatchik* Gennady Zyuganov, is one of the major anti-reformist forces in Russia. Its constituency is largely seniors who have suffered moral, political, and economic loss during the reform period. Their strong nostalgic sentiment and the lack of apparent prospects for a better future make them an active and well-organized force in contrast to the comparatively passive and irresolute democrats.

True to form, the communists are experts in manipulating public discontent with reform. They exaggerate the hardships, focus on the "humiliation of the nation," and predict "the extinction of the population." The party platform calls for the de-nationalization of private property, direct government regulation of the economy, and restoration of the Soviet political system. It also advocates restoration of the Soviet Union and confrontation with the capitalist West. This movement undoubtedly represents an open threat to the nascent democracy in Russia, and even partial implementation of its goals could unleash social conflict. Few believe that the communists will fully re-nationalize the al-

ready privatized industries, but their effort to redistribute wealth could destabilize the political and economic situation.

Zyuganov's main partners in the CPRF are Svetlana Goryacheva, Yeltsin's bellicose opponent in the former Russian Supreme Soviet, and Aman Tuleyev, a regional boss from Kemerovo and Yeltsin's opponent in the 1991 presidential election. Among other well-known figures on the list are August 1991 coup leaders Anatoly Lukyanov, the former USSR Supreme Soviet Speaker, and Victor Ilyukhin, Chairman of the Duma Security Committee and a former prosecutor who once charged Mikhail Gorbachev with "high treason" for dismantling the Soviet state.

### **Other Communist Groups**

The CPRF is not the only communist organization running for the Duma. Others have coalesced into a radical communist bloc called Communists-Working Russia-for the Soviet Union, which expects to attract voters positioned to the left of Zyuganov and pledges an even stronger commitment to restoring the communist system. Zyuganov is not expected to carry large cities like Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg because of strong support for reformers in these cities. However, the CPRF should enjoy greater support in smaller cities and towns in the so-called red belt south and east of Moscow. The nationwide network of local party chapters which remained virtually intact after the collapse of the CPSU constitutes an unsurpassed political machine. This represents a significant electoral advantage for the communists, who are expected to get up to 15 percent of the vote.

### **Agrarian Party**

The Agrarian Party is headed by Ivan Lapshin, Chairman of its Duma faction and director of the Lenin's Legacy state farm (*sovkhos*) on the outskirts of Moscow. The party's political slogans and electoral base are much the same as those of the communists: pensioners, state farm managers and workers, and members of collective farms. Since agricultural reform has been slow and timid, the system remains essentially as it was under the totalitarian regime: dominated by all-powerful collective farm chairmen at the expense of poor peasants. Most collective farms supposedly have been reshaped into "joint-stock companies," but these companies are a fiction. In fact, there is virtually no private farmland, and the few private farmers that exist are harassed and persecuted by the rural communist networks.

The Agrarians criticize the present regime as "anti-popular, anti-national and anti-peasant." Granting people private ownership of land is, in Lapshin's words, "a diabolic enterprise which will ruin the social and economic stability of the country." Regarding the communists as their closest allies, the Agrarians also call for restoring the power of the Soviets and restoring the USSR. In addition, they demand that the agrarian sector be made a top priority in national economic policy.

The party's electoral list is one of the largest in Russia: 437 names, of which 270 are on the federal list and 167 intend to run in single-mandate constituencies. The Agrarians have a stable electorate in the countryside which is easily controlled. A local Agrarian boss can make life unbearable for those who dare challenge the party in the elections. Thus, a 5 percent vote is virtually guaranteed. However, the party has a much slimmer chance in the cities, where nearly 70 percent of the Russian population lives. All in all, the Agrarians could gather up to 10 percent of the votes in the Duma elections.

## **THE NATIONALISTS**

Russian nationalist parties that favor a strong state and a return to an imperialist system occupy a broad space in the political spectrum.

## **Liberal Democratic Party of Russia**

The Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) is headed by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the party's Duma faction and a lawyer with strong intelligence community connections. The LDPR's platform is based largely on the ideas of Russian chauvinism, which have become widespread in the wake of the Soviet breakup. Zhirinovsky manipulates the Russian people by evoking xenophobic sentiment, anti-Semitism, and racial hatred for non-Russians such as Azerbaijanis, Chechens, and Uzbeks. His electorate is comprised of those unable to advance either in the old Soviet Union or under the current system: the unemployed, unqualified workers, and retired and acting military officers. Zhirinovsky also attracts the rank and file in the armed forces, members of the military-industrial complex, and elements of the Russian "mafia" who applaud his anti-Western declarations and defiance.

Though Zhirinovsky is not opposed to private property in principle, some redistribution in favor of his supporters undoubtedly would take place if he came to power. Therefore, some influential economic forces in the country, anxious to capitalize on this redistribution, covertly support the LDPR while openly supporting other parties. Fearing expropriation, many Russian businessmen wish to "diversify the risk" of doing business in Russia.

Zhirinovsky's popularity, however, is faltering. Some of his slogans and rhetoric have been taken up by the present government and by his nationalist competitors. His electorate is unpredictable, although he could still do well among soldiers who vote under the tight control of the many officers who share Zhirinovsky's views. Since the nationalist leader supports increases in the defense budget, the Army continuously flirts with him; Defense Minister Pavel Grachev even promoted him to Lieutenant-Colonel in the reserves—two ranks higher than the rank of captain he used to hold.

The LDPR will easily make the 5 percent level, but it will not get the 30 percent which Zhirinovsky has predicted. A more likely figure is 7 percent. If he gets over 15 percent, Zhirinovsky will likely throw his hat into the ring in next June's presidential election.

## **Congress of Russian Communities (KRO)**

The Congress of Russian Communities is headed by Yuri Skokov, former Yeltsin ally, former National Security Council Secretary, and a military-industrial chieftain. However, Skokov is not the most popular and charismatic figure in the KRO. Much more popular is retired General Alexander Lebed, former commanding officer of the 14th Army and number two on the party list. Lebed was the most popular Russian politician during the summer months.<sup>3</sup> The third spot, behind Lebed and Skokov, is occupied by Sergei Glaziev, an archopponent of the current regime and protectionist foe of free-market reforms who advocates stronger government involvement in the economy.

The Congress of Russian Communities calls for countering centrifugal and separatist trends in Russia and for protecting the Russian minorities in the so-called Near Abroad. However, its support base seems to be more concentrated abroad than in Russia proper. Skokov, an uncharismatic Soviet-era technocrat, is not very popular. His support comes mainly from the ranks of the military. Lebed presents himself as an honest man with a "law and order" message, but many intellectuals abhor his rude manners. Both Skokov and Lebed, however, could rally the support of rank-and-file officers and the military-industrial complex. It is expected that the Congress of Russian Communities will make 5 percent in the elections.

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3 See Ariel Cohen, "General Alexander Lebed: Russia's Rising Political Star," Heritage Foundation *F.Y.I.* No. 65, September 26, 1995.

### **Derzhava (Great Power) Movement**

The Congress of Russian Communities is being challenged by the *Derzhava* (Great Power) Movement headed by Alexander Ruts koy, former deputy to Yeltsin and one of the October 1993 mutiny leaders. Ruts koy can expect some support from the officer corps since he is a veteran and an Afghan War hero. Evoking memories of Russia's imperial and religious past, he calls for "a restoration of Holy Russia as a Unitarian state in its natural borders," implying the pre-World War I borders of czarist Russia.

Ruts koy accepted two defectors from Zhirinovsk y's party and found them places on his own list. His number two man, chief campaign organizer Victor Kobelev, is one of these. Third on the list is Konstantin Dushenov, former spokesman for the famous ultra-nationalist Bishop Ioann (John) of Kronstadt and the Ladoga, in the St. Petersburg region. To boost fund-raising, Ruts koy also has put some "New Russian" businessmen on his party list. This policy evoked a wave of protests from veterans of the nationalist movement, who accused Ruts koy of staging an "anti-patriotic coup" and of turning the party into a "social-criminal movement." Their subsequent withdrawal from the party left Ruts koy weakened.

Like *Yabloko*, *Derzhava* was denied registration by the Central Electoral Commission, but the Supreme Court has overturned that ruling. Ruts koy's group is among those that are unlikely to clear the 5 percent hurdle.

### **Union of Patriots**

Another nationalist bloc with the slogan of "protecting the Russian man" is the Union of Patriots. Formed on the basis of the Russian National *Sobor* (Union) organization and headed by ex-KGB General Alexander Sterligov, this bloc also includes two of the August 1991 coup instigators, industrial manager Alexander Tizyakov and Army General Valentin Varennikov. Russian National *Sobor* supporters include devout Russian Orthodox believers and paramilitary Cossacks, as well as the military-industrial complex. The bloc probably will not achieve the 5 percent threshold.

### **For the Motherland**

Nationalist-oriented Afghan War veterans and some trade unions are backing yet another nationalist opposition bloc, For the Motherland, headed by Vladimir Polevanov. Vice-premier and Privatization Minister for Yeltsin for six months in 1994-1995, Polevanov was dismissed for opposing the government's privatization policy. Second in the party ranks is Commander in Chief of Airborne Troops Evgueni Podkolzin, who enjoys the respect of the military and has criticized the Defense Ministry for its poor handling of the Chechen campaign. Famous ice-hockey goal-keeper Vladislav Tretyak is also high on the party list, but his presence is unlikely to give For the Motherland the capacity to surmount the 5 percent hurdle.

## **SPECIAL-INTEREST ELECTORAL BLOCS**

### **Women of Russia**

The Women of Russia movement is headed by Alevtina Fedulova, Deputy Speaker of the current Duma, longtime communist, and *Komsomol* (Young Communist League) *apparatchik*; Yekaterina Lakhova, leader of the party's faction in the Duma and advisor to the president on family issues; and Galina Klimantova, chairman of the Duma Women, Family and Youth Issues Committee. The movement claims to represent specific women's interests, focusing on welfare issues, improving women's social status, and anti-discriminatory employment measures. Such slogans are likely to attract some of the female electorate and may give the movement the 5 percent of votes it needs to get into the Duma.



On many economic and political issues, Women of Russia is close to the communists and Agrarians. However, its voting record in the Duma has not been as close to that of the communists as many had expected. The movement has about 80 candidates on the federal list and over 20 in the single-mandate districts.

### **Environmental Protection Party of Russia**

The Environmental Protection Party of Russia (KEDR/Cedar) is an ecological movement. Popular TV anchorman Leonid Yakubovich, prominent businessman Artem Tarasov, writer and *Novy Mir* literary journal chief editor Sergei Zalygin, and cosmonaut Musa Manarov top the party's list. KEDR/Cedar unites 40 environmental movements and has 224 candidates on its federal list and 115 in the single-mandate districts. However, its chances to make the 5 percent threshold are slim.

### **Trade Unions and Industrialists of Russia-Union of Labor**

Trade Unions and Industrialists of Russia-Union of Labor was formed by former components of the Rybkin bloc—the Russian United Industrial Party of Vladimir Shcherbakov, Mikhail Shmakov's Federation of Independent Trade Unions, and Arkady Volsky's Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. This group pledges to "revive domestic industries, insure high employment, obey the law, ease ethnic tensions and revitalize the Russian state." Similar to Volsky's Civic Union back in the 1993 elections, however, it is not likely to make the 5 percent threshold.

### **Others**

Electoral blocs based on specific interests include such associations as the Beer Lovers' Party, Christian-Democratic Union-Russian Christians, the Protection of the Disabled Party, the Lawyers' Association, the Pensioner Protection Party and its bloc, and the "Nur" Moslem Movement. Although each of these parties succeeded in obtaining the 200,000 signatures needed to begin a campaign, the 5 percent threshold may be an insurmountable barrier. Their expectations probably can be realized only in single-mandate constituencies where some of their famous leaders are candidates.

The role of the military in the upcoming election deserves special attention. Although the armed forces cannot submit a party list, there are over 100 active duty officers on various party lists and running in single-mandate constituencies. Defense Minister Grachev has openly encouraged the political involvement of the officer corps, including running for office in uniform, in the hope they will lobby for military interests in the new Duma. Grachev put his Deputy Chief of the General Staff, three-star Colonel-General Anatoly Bogdanov, in charge of this operation. Some military units reportedly have deployed their own TV studios to advertise their commanders' campaigns.

## **CONCLUSION**

With the exception of the communists, no electoral bloc will win more than 10-12 percent of the Duma seats. Presidential analyst Marc Urnov forecasts that only the Communist Party, the Agrarians, Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democrats, *Yabloko*, Our Home Is Russia, and the Congress of Russian Communities will be able to clear the 5 percent hurdle. The Duma will be split into a multitude of minor factions cooperating or confronting each other on each individual issue.

**Ascendancy of the Nationalists and Leftists.** A shift toward the leftist and nationalist parties is widely predicted. A pronounced nationalist-leftist orientation in the Duma could trigger attempts to revise the existing constitution. The Duma may wish to curtail the powers of the president and enhance its own. Under these circumstances, the president would likely veto almost all laws passed by the Duma. (So far, only 20 percent of passed legislation has been rejected.) The upshot would be a return to the confrontation and crisis that resulted in the storming of the old Russian Parliament in 1993.

**Unpleasant Surprises.** Particularly dangerous is the possibility of increased criminal power in the Duma. According to some estimates by the Interior Ministry, 25 to 30 percent of the newly elected members will be influenced by criminal organizations, either openly or covertly. If true, these delegates would use their power to entrench criminal groups even further in Russian society. These corrupt deputies could become a ruling majority in the Duma regardless of party affiliation.

The possibility of postponement or annulment of the election by the president cannot be excluded. A violent extremist action could serve as the pretext for such action. Certain forces in Yeltsin's inner circle are determined to preserve their own position by preventing a new Duma from coming to power. A low turnout at the elections (less than 25 percent of eligible voters) also might provide a legal basis for declaring the December elections invalid and governing without the Duma.

As the elections draw near, attempts on the part of potential losers to delay them or change the rules of the game are becoming more pronounced. Loopholes in the electoral legislation are the main pretext for such disruptions. For example, a large group of Duma deputies has requested the Constitutional Court to examine the 5 percent threshold rule and other issues, but were rebuffed by the Court. All major parties oppose any last-minute revision of the electoral legislation and are very much against postponing the elections.

Technical issues, such as where a party is placed on the ballot, are also important. The drawing of lots which took place November 10, 1995, for example, gave first place to Women of Russia and second to Ruskoy's *Derzhava*. This puts them at an advantage, as most people tend to vote for familiar candidates whose name first meets the eye.

The United States has little ability to influence the outcome of this election. Nevertheless, the American government, including Congress, should continue sending a clear message to the Russian political elite and public that it supports Russia's advance to democracy and a free-market economy. The U.S. also should make it clear that a significant communist or nationalist gain could undermine the progress of reform in Russia and imperil international stability and security. To assuage some Russian fears, the U.S. should emphasize once again that potential NATO expansion is targeted not against Russia or its people, but against extremist forces that could usurp power.

Observers should watch for fraud and doctoring of election results. American and other Western observers might contribute by helping to ensure fair play. However, some Russian experts believe that Western observers could be duped into endorsing a "stolen" election. Observers will be concentrated mainly in the big cities, where public opinion tends to be democratically oriented and fraud would be opposed. Meanwhile, villages and small towns, where it is easier to tamper with ballots, will not be watched closely by outsiders. It is no accident that the communists, the Agrarians, and Zhirinovsky's faction blocked the Duma's adoption of a bill on public supervision of the elections. Major fraud also could be committed not at polling stations, but later, when the votes are being counted.

Whatever occurs at the polls in Russia in December, one thing is certain: These elections are a critical test for Russian democracy. They also are a dress rehearsal for the even more important presidential elections which will take place in Russia in June.