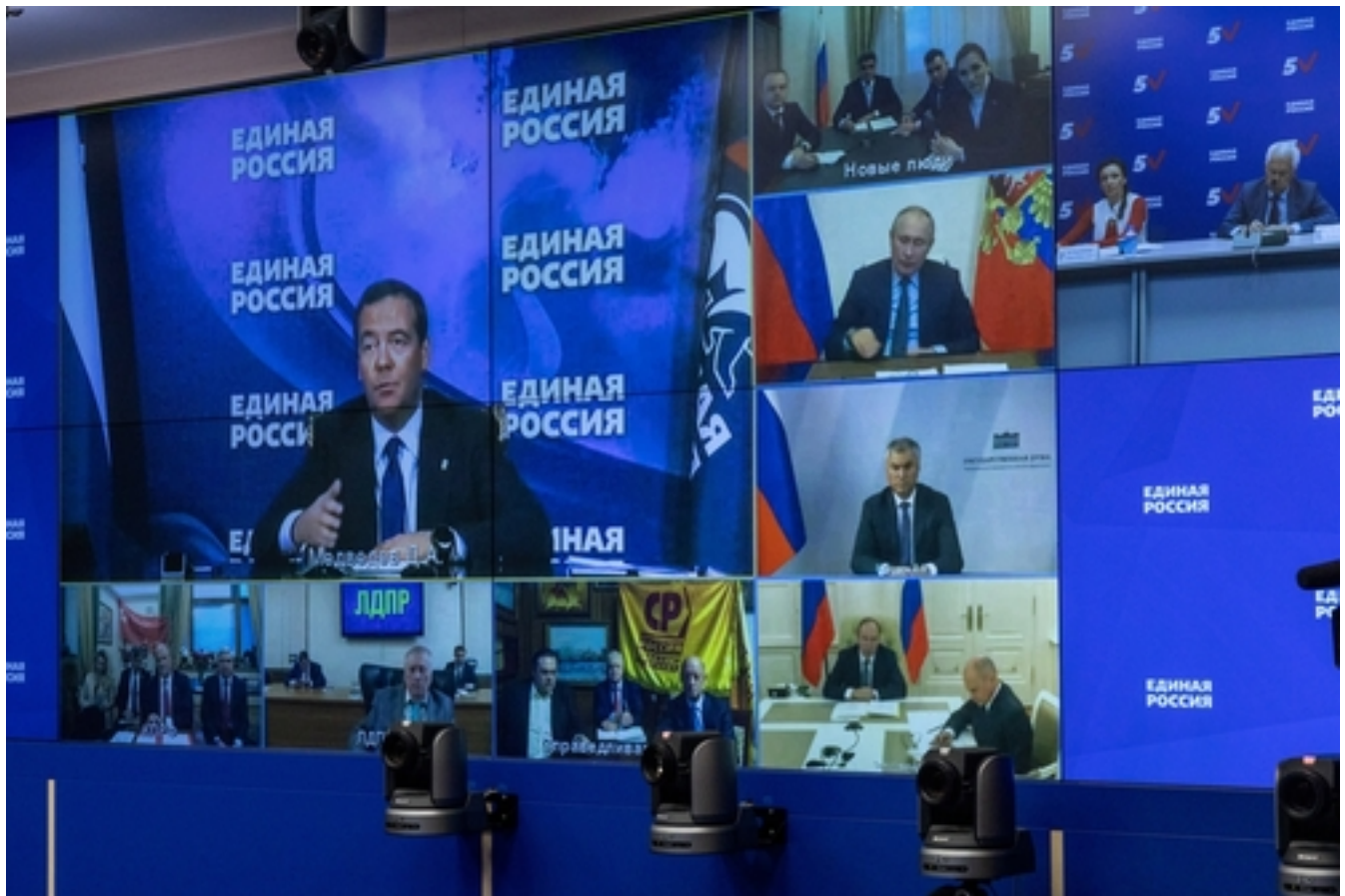




By: *Sergei Stepancev, TA Moscow*

# Is the Russian elite preparing the same scenario for Putin as Khrushchev experienced after the Cuban nuclear crisis?

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The decision by the International Criminal Court to indict and arrest Putin as a war criminal has scattered everything in Russia, including the Kremlin's agenda and Russian propaganda in general.

Had those accusations come from the US or the UK, it would have been much easier for the Russian propaganda machine to bend and twist the facts, and present them to the Russian people as another hostile act by the US or the UK.

Russian people, particularly those who are former Soviet citizens, are used to the theory always provided by Russian (or Soviet) state propaganda that America and the United Kingdom are two evil countries which want to destroy Russia (or the USSR), because of the Russian (or Soviet) authentic and peaceful nature, independent foreign policy and abundant natural resources.

The International Criminal Court, based in The Hague, reached this decision. It is an organisation that most Russian people are familiar with, and not just from history. Russian propaganda has occasionally suggested that the Kyiv regime and president Zelensky himself should be on trial in The Hague, or any other international criminal court.

## Where is the dividing line in the Russian elite?

The Russian political and upper class is now clearly divided. The division goes along the lines of those whose career, and perhaps personal fate, directly depends on the regime, such as propagandist Vladimir Solovyov, Margarita Simonyan, and former head of state Dmitry Medvedev, and those Russian heavyweights who have alternatives.

Since the ICC warrant was released, the former were actively and enthusiastically trying to criticise, mock, and even threaten the ICC, while many other Russian public figures mysteriously remained silent.

The uncertainty and turbulence have already begun. The Russian majority is confused. The Russian ruling class is divided.

Lackeys are still with president Putin, simply because they have no alternative. Those in the Russian establishment who can afford some independent thinking and manoeuvring are already trying to buy time and figure out what to do next.

The country, which is under the rule of an accused war criminal, is not only illegitimate, but also a war criminal itself.

Everything Russia has accused Ukraine and the Ukrainian authorities of since 2014 has now come back to hunt the Russian regime and Russia in the ICC's arrest warrant on Putin.

No one in the Russian political class wants to be proclaimed a war criminal.

The Russian people and the ruling class are now confused. First, they all were confident that Kyiv would fall in a matter of days.

Then they were all confident that the Western political class would not be able to mobilise and unite against Russian aggression.

Finally, no one in Russia expected Putin to be erased from the global political landscape.

## Xi and China are the way out, but there is no room for all

All forecasts by the Russian political class and convictions of the average Russian person ended up being false.

The West has erased Putin from the global palette. The leader of the Russian Federation is now an accused war criminal.

Russian propaganda is now desperately trying to paint Xi's recent visit to Moscow as Putin's great success, but this legend is only good for Russian TV viewers. It offers no solutions for the Russian political class.

First of all, no one knows what Putin and Xi discussed. Secondly, while Putin's obvious main concerns are his personal, not state plans, which he definitely sees in conjunction with Xi and China, for the people around Putin, those who have not yet been declared war criminals, things are entirely different.

In such a relationship with the state leader, they could conclude that there is no room for them in a Putin-Xi duet, and therefore they have definitely begun exploring other plans which do not relate to Xi and China.

## Who will blink first - Putin or the elite?

Since the ICC warrant was released, the decision to invade Ukraine started to appear entirely different.

People around Putin have a choice to remain with the accused war criminal or to switch camp. Surely Putin knows what people around him are now beginning to think, because over two decades, Putin has cultivated and gathered around him the most vile, cowardly, and unprincipled people.

Those are the most unreliable people one can imagine. Surely these are not the people Putin wants to turn his back on.

Moreover, both Putin and the Russian political class know well that the Russian majority will now more than ever expect trials and prosecutions of those they blame for the current catastrophic situation.

The Russian majority will now expect Putin to point at those who are responsible for the current setback.

Putin has to do it because he knows well that he could end up being the one blamed by the establishment and the party, just as Nikita Khrushchev was blamed for losing the Caribbean crisis.

Putin now knows he needs to strike

domestically, and the Russian ruling class knows that they need to strike Putin back before he finishes them all one by one, thereby entertaining the majority of people in the Russian Federation.

The Russian establishment knows well that delivering Putin to The Hague would not only lift the sanctions and end the war, but would also preoccupy the Russian majority for several years to come.