

The “Post Cold War” 1993 Yeltsin-CIA Presidential Coup

Part III of an 8-part Series

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The August 1991 countercoup rendered redundant the unsigned Union of Sovereign States Treaty. By September 1, 11 Soviet republics had declared independence. By December 25, all had done so. Meanwhile:

- August 22 – Russian President **Boris Yeltsin** purges national security agencies. Gorbachev rubberstamps all decisions.
- August 23 – U.S. President **George Bush Sr** watches live from Kennebunkport as Yeltsin compels a humiliated **Mikhail Gorbachev** to read aloud, to the Supreme Soviet, minutes of the Politburo meeting wherein coup-plotters denounced Gorbachev. Yeltsin suspends the Russian Communist Party.
- August 24 – Gorbachev dissolves the Soviet Communist Party’s Central Committee.
- August 25 – Yeltsin seizes Communist Party assets.
- September 1 – USSR’s Armed Force’s Political Directorate closes.
- September 5 – USSR’s Congress of Deputies self-liquidates.
- December 8 – Presidents of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus sign the Commonwealth of Independent States Treaty. A breathless Yeltsin calls Bush panting: “*Mr. President the Soviet Union is no more.*” (Bush found out before Gorbachev.)
- December 16 – U.S. Secretary of State **James Baker** arrives in Moscow to finalize nuclear details.
- December 25 – A live television broadcast shows Gorbachev resigning as USSR President and handing the nuclear briefcase to Yeltsin. Hammer-and-sickle lowers. Tricolor rises. (1)

In his first visit to the USA as Russian President (June 1992), Yeltsin chirped Reaganesque jingles to a joint session of Congress:

“Communism has no human face. Freedom and communism are incompatible...Today the freedom of America is being upheld in Russia.” (2)

Yeltsin asked Bush for a statement describing Russia as an “ally.” Bush demurred. (3)



Yeltsin on 22 August 1991 (Licensed under CC BY 4.0)

The 1992 *US Freedom Support Act* earmarked \$400 million for aid to post-Soviet states. A separate Cooperative Threat Reduction Program financed decommissioning of nuclear arsenals. These allotments were supplemented by European aid and by clandestine funds. Additional Western aid spooled through the World Bank and IMF. Yeltsin pleaded for aid while expressing fears of appearing dependent.

With the August 1991 counter coup Western intelligence services secured a lock on the executive chambers of the Russian state, and strengthened their influence over Russian media and civil society. The counter coup did not, however, accomplish their ultimate aim, which **Satter**, describes as:

“...to reach a ‘point of no return,’ beyond which it would be impossible to restore socialism regardless of the will of the people.” (4)

Privatization hit jarring turbulence January 2, 1992 when neoliberal zealot, **Deputy Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar**, removed price controls. Gaidar’s “shock therapy” proved wildly unpopular. Russians joked “*where’s the therapy?*”. In December Yeltsin nominated Gaidar for Prime Minister. Parliament balked. (5)

In March 1993 Yeltsin decreed a period of “special rule” which his own Vice President, **Alexander Rutskoi**, wouldn’t countersign. Parliament and the Constitutional Court quashed numerous such decrees. Yeltsin responded by summoning a “constitutional committee.” A parliamentary impeachment vote fell just shy of the needed two-thirds support. Another impeachment vote loomed. (6)

On August 31, Yeltsin, sporting an Airborne beret, attended military exercises outside Moscow. The inspected units consisted of a handpicked tank brigade and Defense Minister

Pavel Grachev's former stomping-ground, the 106th Airborne. During the exercises 'Mercedes' Grachev flanked Yeltsin. Days later, Yeltsin fired VP Ruskoi, who, alongside Legislative Chair, **Ruslan Khasbulatov** (both former Yeltsin allies) would lead opposition to the 1993 Presidential Coup. (7)

In September 21, Yeltsin read Decree 1400 on a nationwide television broadcast. Decree 1400 dissolved parliament and stripped parliamentarians of immunity. It suspended both the Constitutional Court and key sections of the constitution. (8)



Yeltsin during the signature ceremony of the START II in Moscow, 3 January 1993 (Licensed under the Public Domain)

There is no doubting Decree 1400's criminality. Even Short acknowledges it was illegal, and that Yeltsin knew this. (9) **Colton**, in his go-to biography, *Yeltsin*, confirms Yeltsin: "*had no right to resolve a deadlock by ending a session of parliament*" (10), adding:

"As he (Yeltsin) wrote a year later, 'Here I was, the first popularly elected President, violating the law'." (11)

The Constitutional Court declared Decree 1400 invalid and removed Yeltsin from his post, making Ruskoi President. (12) Russia's largest trade union federation denounced Decree 1400, as did the overwhelming majority of its affiliates. (13) Eighty-three of 89 regions in the Russian Federation (including Moscow and St. Petersburg) proclaimed Decree 1400 illegal. (14)

Ruslan Khasbulatov christened Decree 1400 the inauguration of a "*fascist dictatorship*" (15) recounting:

"This person (Yeltsin) degenerated before my very eyes. He stopped being a leader and

converted himself into a kind of puppet of those who have been called a 'collective Rasputin'..." (16)

According to Khasbulatov, Yeltsin became "a plaything of shadowy power brokers" seeking a "semicolonial regime" wherein a "criminal and semifeudal" Russian state would be bonded to foreign interests. (17)

Khasbulatov recalled: "Yeltsin's entourage was full of Americans... a hundred CIA employees determined everything." Yeltsin sent security officials and department heads to the USA to be vetted. (18) Ruskoi claimed a dozen CIA agents micromanaged privatization. (19)

Colton details how Yeltsin routinely consulted Western leaders, and how a "mutual admiration society" existed between Yeltsin and US Ambassador **Robert Strauss**, with Strauss "grooming" Yeltsin. (20)

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Parliament's anointing of a Ruskoi presidency made violence inevitable. Television stations backed Yeltsin to the hilt. On October 3, Gaidar broadcast an emotional call-to-the-streets. 20,000 Muscovites responded. Pro-parliament crowds were far larger and more impassioned[WK1] . **Brute armed force alone saved Yeltsin.** Grachev's 106th Airborne and the select tank division surrounded, then bombarded, the parliament building. (21)

Efforts by civilians to overrun the Ostankino Television station fell into a trap. Hundreds of heavily armed commandos lay in wait. Few in the civilian crowd approaching the station possessed weapons. Despite this, the commandos raked the entire crowd with machine-gun fire. Unarmed protesters were forced to lay on the asphalt... then strafed again. Spectators were shot running away. Ambulance crews were shot.

The several hundred democracy defenders holed-up at the parliament building surrendered after the building took multiple tank rounds. They were detained by OMON officers, who, after being plied with crates of vodka, embarked on an orgy of beating and killing. (22) In the aftermath, one witness recounted:

"The morgue was filled to overflowing. Corpses lay piled on stretchers, one on top of the other. Many of the corpses had horribly mutilated faces, which people had covered with towels." (23)

Airborne and OMON snipers fired throughout the night; seemingly at any civilian in their sights.

The government initially refused to report casualties. When they did, their tally - 187 killed and 1,000 wounded - was absurdly low. All unofficial accounts arrive at much higher figures.(24) A team of Ukrainian journalists put the civilian death toll at 2,783. (25) Wounded and severely battered people must have exceeded 10,000.

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In November, Russians caught their first glimpse of the draft constitution on which a referendum would be held 30 days later. Duma elections occurred simultaneously. Opposition papers were banned. Pro-government papers received vast subsidies. Radio and television coverage was censored and biased.

(The US Government's Radio Liberty had enjoyed unrestricted broadcasting privileges since August 1991.) Opposition groups were denied public meeting venues. OMON troops trashed their offices. In Moscow 275 neighborhood self-management committees were disbursed. The Electoral Commission barred scrutineers. The Constitutional Court was padlocked. The fire-scorched parliament building sat vacant.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) won the right to participate; albeit two weeks before the deadline for registration, which required a massive list of signatures. The CPRF came through, outstripping all parties in signatures collected. (26) They, and all oppositionists, endured torrents of threats.

The Referendum Law stipulated that a vote be held on an alternative draft constitution if sufficient petitioners so requested. This threshold was met with a petition signed by 1.2 million. The law was disregarded. (27)

The Referendum Law required proposed constitutional changes be approved by 50% of registered voters. By the time polls closed fewer than 40% had voted. Suddenly, inexplicably the vote tally jumped by 25%. Fraud was blatant and sloppy. Commissioners issued two different tallies; neither added up. A majority of registered voters did not validate the 1993 constitution. (28)

The 1993 constitution is hyper-presidential. Presidents possess exclusive right to nominate prime ministers, military commanders, judges, ambassadors. If parliaments reject prime ministers, presidents dissolve parliament. Procedures for removing presidents are so complex and difficult as to render impeachment impossible. Presidents may veto any law. Overturning vetoes is all but impossible.

The constitution specified sitting judges were to remain in place until a new judicial law passed. On the first day the constitution came into effect Yeltsin broke this law; firing the Constitutional Court. (29)

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The 1993 Presidential Coup played out in microcosm in St. Petersburg where Mayor **Sobchak** crushed democratic aspirations. When the coup began Sobchak and local military commanders declared support for Yeltsin. City Council split, most considering Yeltsin's conduct illegal.

The crisis afforded **Vladimir Putin** an opportunity to audition before foreign consuls with daily briefings:

"Putin told the consuls that 'prophylactic measures' had been taken against armed extremists and OMON detachments had been assigned to protect the television station, the City Hall, and other sensitive locations. Asked about the authorities in the Leningrad Region, who had supported Khasbulatov's insurgency, he replied contemptuously that they were irrelevant. "They have no money and no means of influencing the situation. At most they can get some collective farm to demonstrate." (30)

The Swedish Consul dispatched rave reviews back to Stockholm:

"Here spoke a man... who knew how to exercise power...He (Putin) showed ...unequivocal support for Yeltsin and a slightly arrogant conviction that the coup

makers did not stand a chance.” (31)

A victorious Yeltsin augmented Sobchak’s powers with the additional title of “Chair of Civic Chamber.” Sobchak ordered Councilors to remove personal belongings from their offices and vacate Council premises, which were then sealed by an OMON detachment. (32)

Liberated from Council oversight onto his local foreign affairs fiefdom Putin grew more neoliberal than thou. While Yeltsin and Sobchak bitterly complained about Western powers not doing enough to stabilize Russia and facilitate the transition to capitalism, Putin wouldn’t whisper a defiant word. He defended all Western measures, especially those of the World Bank and IMF.

Putin toed the ruling line on the touchstone issue of homosexuality; straying far from traditional values. A flamboyantly gay American concert promoter was hired by St. Petersburg’s cultural affairs department. Sobchak couldn’t stomach him. Putin cherished him. To mark the gay American’s departure Putin threw a lavish lunch in his honor, toasting him as “*a member of our family.*” Putin’s conduct “*went far beyond the obligatory minimum for a departing adviser.*” (33)

Deputy Mayor Putin cloyingly co-mingled with West Europeans, especially those with aristocratic pedigree. Between 1991 and 1996 Putin sallied through Western Europe *hundreds* of times.

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William Walter Kay is a regular contributor to Global Research.

Notes

1 Colton, Timothy, J. *Yeltsin*, Basic Books (Perseus Books), New York, 2008, p. 202-7

2 Ibid, p. 266

3 Ibid, p. 267

4 Satter, David. *The Less You Know, the Better You Sleep: Russia’s Road to Terror and Dictatorship Under Yeltsin and Putin*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2017, p. 41

5 Colton, p. 272

6 Ibid, p. 273-7

7 Ibid, p. 276-7

8 Buzgalin, Alexander and Kolganov, Andrei. *Bloody October in Moscow: Political Repression in the Name of Reform*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1994, p. 34

9 Short, Philip. *Putin*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2022, p. 172

10 Colton, p. 272

11 Ibid, p. 277

12 Buzgalin, p. 42

13 Ibid, p. 43

14 Ibid, p. 49

15 Colton, p. 276-7

16 Ibid, p. 275

17 Ibid, p. 275

18 Tickle, Jonny. *Boris Yeltsin had entourage of hundreds of CIA agents* June 12, 2021, RT (article also carried by news agency, Mehr)

19 Ibid

20 Colton, p. 267 and 299

21 Short, p. 173

22 Buzgalin, p. 163-94

23 Ibid, p. 190

24 Short, p. 174

25 Satter, p. 62

26 Buzgalin, p. 195-201

27 Ibid, p. 200

28 Ibid, p. 199

29 Ibid, p. 200

30 Short, p. 172-4

31 Ibid, p. 174

32 Ibid, p. 174

33 Ibid, p. 550-1

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