

The Ponomarev Plan - FAQ:

1. What is the Ponomarev Plan?

It is my plan for the transformation of Russia, from its current autocratic state into a democracy. From Putin and Putinism and facism, into a democratic state with a new constitution, new laws, a new judicial system, and free and fair elections.

2. How will this happen?

It will happen like this: The people will revolt, and they will push new leadership and a new form of government into power, while pushing the old elites out.

3. It sounds like what you are describing here is a revolution. Is that right, a revolution in Russia?

Yes, what we are talking about is a revolution.

4. Does this revolution have a name?

Yes. It is the New Russian Revolution.

5. And you are the leader of the New Russian Revolution?

Yes.

6. Most people, especially in Russia, aren't sitting around planning a revolution. Why are you planning a revolution? And for how long have you been planning?

My history of fighting to make my country a better place goes back a long way. And my family's history of fighting for a better Russia goes back even further. My great grand-grand-something-father was Michael Speransky, at times the second man in Russia and Napoleon's friend, who is famous for the creation back in the beginning of the XIX century of the first parliamentary body in Russia - the State Council. My grandfather served as the Russian ambassador to Poland in the early 1980s. Although it cost him his career, he stood up to the leader of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev, and prevented the Soviet Union from invading Poland. My mother was a member of the Russian Senate until she was removed for making a series of unpopular votes in opposition to Putin.

And then there is my personal history:

I used to be a member of the Russian Parliament or State Duma, where I cast the only vote against the annexation of Crimea in 2014. I also predicted in many TV interviews in the US and Europe and even in Russia and Ukraine that the annexation of Crimea would eventually lead to a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

In retaliation for all that, Putin forced me into exile and put me on his kill list.

But my history of opposing Putin goes all the way back to 2001, when I became a well-known radical and part of Russia's opposition movement.

So fighting for a better future for Russia is in my blood, and this fight has been a central focus of mine for almost my entire adult life.

7. You say you want to transform Russia from its current state into a democracy. Yet you were born into a prominent family during communist times. You were a member, yourself, of the Communist Party part of the time you were serving in the Russian Parliament. Doesn't that seem like an odd background for someone who is, today, a cheerleader for democracy?

Everything you have said here is true. But it doesn't offer a complete picture of my history and experience. For instance, before I was elected to the Parliament I had a very successful business career in the oil and gas industry. From there I moved into the technology field. One of the companies I was part of, in 2001 when I was 27 years old, was an interactive TV platform. Our main investor was to be Ted Turner, but he backed out of the investment when Putin began cracking down on other Russian media companies. At that very moment, I swore that I would do everything I could to prevent the state from ever interfering again in my affairs or anyone else's, and my career in politics was born.

At age thirty-one, I became the Director of Russia's High Technology Park's Task Force for the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications. This was during a brief time of positive change in Russia, and we successfully covered Russia with a network of technology parks aimed at fostering innovation, bringing our most talented entrepreneurs back to Russia, and supporting an emerging economy.

At age thirty-two, I was elected to the State Duma and became the chairman of the Innovation and Venture Capital Subcommittee of the Committee for Economic Development and Entrepreneurship—the leading technology policymaker for the Russian state. As a member of Parliament, my district was considered the “Silicon Valley of Russia,” and I spent much of my time while I was in Parliament in San Francisco, Silicon Valley, Boston, Austin, New York and Washington DC working with government and tech company leaders to strengthen the relationship between the US and my country during this time of promise in Russia.

After I was forced into exile by Putin, I spent two years living and working in Silicon Valley. Then I moved to Kyiv, another tech and business hub. Just as an aside, my company Trident Acquisitions was the first Ukrainian company ever to go public in the US.

So, yes. I was born and raised in a communist country. But I have spent most of my adult life visiting and studying and then living, and also thriving, in two great nations (the US and Ukraine) where democracy thrives.

I also understand that my background and experiences are as important a part of the Ponomarev Plan as the plan itself. If you want to know more about my background and the plan, you might want to read my book “Does Putin Have to Die?: The Story of How Russia Becomes a Democracy after Losing to Ukraine.”

8. Particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it seems like there are lots of Russians who say they have a better idea for the future of Russia. Navalny and Kasparov, for instance, come to mind. Surely you must know them from your time as a young opposition leader. How would you compare your vision for the future of Russia to the visions or plans that they present?

Yes, I know Navalny and Kasparov quite well. And I am quite familiar with the vision they and other Russian liberals have for the country, and how they would achieve their goals.

While well intentioned, Russian liberals like Navalny and Kasparov are political animals. Their vision for Russia is a political vision. It puts them, as politicians, at the center.

That's not my view of the world. And it's not my vision for Russia.

It's not my goal to bring democracy to Russia because I think it's a great political system. It is my goal to bring democracy to Russia because I have seen it at work in real time, and I have also seen the current and previous Russian systems at work in real time. And it's clear to me that what's best for us, as a nation and as a people, is to abandon our current centralized system of government in Russia and to live free as a democracy.

Yes, making this happen in Russia will involve politics. But only as a means to an end. This is unlike typical Russian liberals, who often see political victory as the end itself.

There is another significant way in which I differ from Navalny, Kasparov and other Russian liberals.

Because their goals are political, they envision they can accomplish those goals using a series of political maneuvers.

Yes, they may be able to use politics to create some form of change that positions themselves in a place of power. But this will not be a form of lasting change that serves the Russian people.

On the other hand, my vision is for the people. Not myself.

9. Your theme of "Power to the People" brings us back to the idea of protests, rebellions and revolution.

Yes, that's right.

This is ironic, of course. Russian liberals love protests. These are often political and predictable and attract TV cameras and media. But at the same time, these same liberals are terrified of revolution. Because a revolution is not predictable. It is not political. It is the raw power of the people fighting both as individuals and collectively for that which they know is right, and against that which they know is wrong.

So politicians like Kasparov and Navalny avoid any discussion of revolution.

I don't share this fear or concern. Actually, I think it's pointless to talk about a positive future for Russia that includes freedom and democracy without talking about, and planning for, revolution. Because a revolution is how the people speak. It is how they demand the right to choose a new form of government.

10. For how long have you been thinking that a revolution would be necessary in Russia? And at what point did you realize you could and should be the leader of this revolution?

I've always dreamt of positive change.

Before 1991, it was a time when we were experiencing evolutionary changes in the Soviet Union and hoped for a better life. By 1991, many of these expectations proved futile, and many illusions were lost.

But the energy in society was so high that it blew the USSR apart—and it was the first revolution I witnessed, almost without blood. Just three men died during the August coup. In 1993, there was an unsuccessful attempt of a counterrevolution, which was way more violent—nobody knows its death toll, but for sure it is counted in hundreds of souls. After that, for a decade, I firmly believed that “the limit for the revolutions is over,” as the leader of Russian pseudo-communists suggested. And when I came to politics, when my younger comrades were calling for a revolution, I usually smiled, knowing there would be none.

In 2004, Ukraine’s Orange Revolution was a true wake-up call for me. It appeared that revolution a) was possible and b) could be peaceful. In 2005 we almost got to the same point during protests against the monetization of privileges. But in 2008 there was a new president, Medvedev, and many of us decided there could be positive evolutionary changes. But in 2011, when Medvedev and Putin announced they were going to swap positions, and that they actually fooled the whole nation about their arrangement, my last hopes for peaceful resolution were gone. It became clear that it would take a revolution to bring about the necessary changes. But I never saw anyone who could actually lead the organizational efforts to make that happen, so I am working in this direction myself.

11. But do the Russian people want a revolution?

No, of course not. Usually, nobody but a very limited circle of people want revolutions, wars, or violence. Most people prefer a stable and peaceful life. Unfortunately, there are times when one has to fight and Russia is at this moment in its history now; so the question is when this recognition becomes common knowledge in the country.

So instead, we should ask: “Do the Russian people want freedom? Do they want the opportunity to live a better life, like the people of Ukraine, and other parts of Europe, and the US? And are they willing to fight for freedom and a better life like so many people in Iran, for example, are fighting today?”

I believe the Russian people will rise up and revolt at the very moment they see the possibility of freedom and democracy, and also see leaders who are committed to their better lives as a clear and realistic alternative to Putin.

After all, revolution, as romantic it sounds for certain people and as scary for others, is just an instrument of change.

12. Will this revolution involve bloodshed?

Maybe.

Of course, nobody sane ever wants bloodshed. That’s why the Kremlin works so hard to send a message that there are never bloodless revolutions (which is absolutely not true). It is a scare tactic designed to program the very inability to make a peaceful revolution; but I’ve already shown that bloodshed is not required.

However, the elites around Putin must feel threatened. Otherwise they will continue to support the existing system for as long as they enjoy both wealth and safety. On the other hand, the Russian people must be empowered to take to the streets with protests, and demands, and a plan for a new, revolutionary government that is of the people, for the people, and by the people.

13. Can you tell us more about the plan itself?

The plan exists for both revolution, and then a transitional president and government to create a new constitution, new laws and free and democratic elections within a very specific time frame of about two years. This transitional government must be bound by law to disband and transfer power to the new democratically-elected government after the new constitution and laws are written and the first election is held. The leaders of this transitional government must be forbidden by law to ever be part of the government or politics in Russia again, to ensure that their work within the transitional government is focused on serving the best interests of the people instead of themselves.

This revolution will probably be driven by young, tech-enabled Russians; a group which I call the “Russian new class.” A new constitution and new laws will be written with as much input from the people themselves as possible, using their smartphones and tablets and home computers as part of a movement to make sure the creation of Russia’s new democracy is truly representative of the people themselves. This model of direct democracy has already been used successfully by Iceland to write a new constitution, and it will be an important part of Russia’s move forward to ensure the success of the new government.

14. Can you tell us more about your proposed two-year transitional period?

The sequence of steps I see is as follows:

- Immediately after taking power—the formation of a paramilitary Revolutionary government headed by its leader, a Supreme Court of twelve people, the People’s Militia to protect public order, and the National Republican Army. (If you’ve been following news of the invasion closely, you know the National Republican Army already exists as the partisan movement, and I am certain it will grow into something more by the time Putin is gone.) There will no longer be a FSB/KGB: those from there who are in actual crime prevention should join the Militia, while a new FBI-like central investigations service would be created.
- Second. Within sixty days—preparation of the initial draft of the new Constitution, as well as transitional electoral legislation (including the rules for creating parties, election commissions, and uniform election rules for the country from the local to the national level). All of this must be done using tools that provide the greatest amount of efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement as possible.
- Third. Over the next sixty-day period—the formation of parties and election commissions, the preparation of elections.
- Fourth. The next sixty days are for election campaigning.
- Fifth. During the first 150 days—in tandem with steps two to four—a working group uses crowdsourcing technology to prepare the draft of the new Constitution (see chapter 20), and a special task force group with the representatives of interested Russian regions is also working on the text.
- Sixth. On the 180th day, final elections are held at three levels (with two-year terms); the election also includes a referendum on the adoption of the crowdsourced Constitution, and the election of delegates to the Constituent Assembly.
- Seventh. The Constituent Assembly and Parliament start working on the two hundredth day. The Constitution must be ready and adopted by the Constituent Assembly by the end of the first year.

Parliament has partial powers (controls the budget, but does not form the Revolutionary Government and the Judiciary)—its task is to prepare basic laws that are consistent with the new Constitution.

- Eighth. According to the new Constitution, the second year after the change of power is given to the nations that live inside Russia to make decisions about their future status inside or outside Russia. The decision is made on regional referendums after a yearlong period of discussion and free campaigning, in the presence of international observers.

- Ninth. Elections to permanent ruling bodies are held after two years from the date of the first elections (two and a half years from the moment of the revolution). From that date, all the powers of all branches provided for by the new Constitution are exercised in full. The transition period is over.

**15. Who will choose this interim or transitional president and government?
And what is the process by which this transitional president and government will be chosen?**

If the changes happen from the top, the revolting elites will select the next leader. If they are smart, they will select someone neutral and truly interim, but capable of being the guarantor of changes and normalization of relations with the outside world. The danger, of course, is that they might (and probably will) choose a next leader who is just another Putin. Or worse. Because that will be the best leader for them to choose to protect themselves and their own selfish, autocratic interests. It would be very much like Malenkov who succeeded Stalin (if you remember this name, I really appreciate your command of history, but if you don't—it would just prove my point: nothing changed) or Brezhnev who succeeded Khrushchev.

But after February 2022, my bet is on an uprising by the people, which will bring a new leader and revolutionary government to power. To understand how this is likely to happen, one must abandon one's Western ideas about the transfer of power. This will not be a large, formal ceremony that's planned in advance to take place in front of a large audience of seated dignitaries and lots of TV cameras. The new interim government will take power (preferably peacefully, but most likely not) during the course of this uprising. In that sense, the people will have chosen their new leader and the new government by giving their support for the populist uprising.

16. What happens to the current Parliament once Putin is gone and there is a new interim president and government?

There is no Parliament in Russia at this moment, it is just a decoration.

The Constitution will be suspended, and during the transition period the transitional government will be the only legitimate source of power. It will reset and re-create the political system.

As an example of how this will work, look to the successful revolutionary changes of governments in other nations:

a. Poland was transformed via a peaceful "velvet" revolution driven by the Polish Round Table Talks that created a transitional government that existed for two years and prepared free and fair elections.

b. The April 25th [1974] Revolution in Portugal, or Revolução dos Cravos—an example of a successful antifascist military coup that was supported by the majority of people and which eventually led to democratic elections after a two-year transitional period.

c. The 21-year reign of Ferdinand Marcos in Philippines was ended with an unsuccessful military coup that was superseded by a popular uprising, which we now know as Yellow Revolution.

17. What happens to the current court system and all the existing judges once Putin is gone and there is a new interim president and government?

The Russian opposition currently has an explicit list of judges that were involved in political repressions. They, as well as the management of the courts where they worked, are the subject of lustrations. The rest may reapply to the positions of the judge; and if they are elected, they can continue.

18. What are “lustrations”?

For readers in the West, the idea of lustrations may be foreign, so let me briefly explain it this way:

History does not know examples of successful revolutions and even peaceful transformations that are done only by people who are not connected with the current elites.

At some point, “specialists” from the toppling regime appear who want to come to the side of the winners. I don’t want to call them rats, but they are the first to escape from a sinking ship and look for a new vessel for travel. And that’s good—if they really help us to make the change, it should be appreciated.

But victory usually has a lot of fathers. Most of them—just pretending. And also, there is a problem of numerous people who just by being on certain government jobs under Putin supported and facilitated crimes against Ukrainians (and Russians as well!) that simply cannot be forgotten.

Lustrations, therefore, are legislative restrictions for the political elite of the previous government, for the exercise of active and passive suffrage, as well as the right to participate in the management of state affairs. They are introduced after the change of power. More precisely, after the revolution.

The authorities, possessing political will and inspired by the idea, must be aware that old people who have appropriated the status of “elite,” especially in a situation like in Russia, where arbitrariness and decay have reached enormous proportions, cannot and should not occupy positions in the state.

But lustration is not a punishment. It is, on the contrary, in conditions when there are too many potential and accomplished violators, the refusal of punishment, which risks developing into a “witch hunt,” in exchange for an end to sabotage. Cleaning up the reputation of the authorities from the dirty stains of the past. In this sense, lustration is an act of both justice and also mercy.

Postwar Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe went through this experience after the collapse of their totalitarian regimes, deciding: how to close the path to power for those who were involved in atrocities? What to do with the designers, ideologists, and propagandists of the regime? And what about those who ordered the dispersal of popular demonstrations, orders for torture and unjust sentences? How to deal with perpetrators—those who beat protesters; kidnapped oppositionists; searched, arrested, and interrogated; lied to the court? With those who passed unlawful sentences? And with those who secretly helped the special services? Should we dissolve the services themselves? Should we open their archives? Should ruling parties be banned? What about regime symbols? How to change a compromised control apparatus? How about making the new one efficient? And at the same time, do not turn restrictions into an instrument of political struggle and settling scores.

The first lustration law in Eastern Europe was adopted in Czechoslovakia in 1991: it was called “A law prescribing certain additional necessary prerequisites for taking certain elected and appointed positions in state bodies and organizations.” In the same year, Latvia and Lithuania did it. Bulgaria in 1992. Hungary in 1994. A year later, Albania and Estonia. Poland in 1997. Serbia in 2003. And in each of these revolutions, the lustrations were all noticeably different. For example, in the Czech Republic, lustration affected not only about a third of judges who “violated the principle of impartiality and fairness” and 63% of prosecutors or employees of law enforcement agencies, but also media workers, and, in Bulgaria, university professors.

It is believed that in Eastern Europe lustration laws worked successfully where the nomenklatura was completely deprived of influence. I am also a supporter of this approach. For those who were members of Putin’s “United Russia” party, for instance, and did not leave it before the start of changes? For those who were members of the executive branch that violated the rights of citizens, and did not repent? Didn’t resign before the change of power? Sorry, you already chose which side you’re on.

There are also examples of completely unsuccessful lustration. For example, in Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the lustration of members of the Ba’ath Party led to the creation of a powerful armed opposition to the new government, which even the occupying American troops could not defeat. This did not bring closer the settlement and normalization of life in the country, but greatly pushed them back. But I do not think that it is possible to compare the party of timid bureaucrats of Putin’s “United Russia” party and the paramilitary and mass party of the Arab socialists, who went through the crucible of many wars and revolutions.

There are many people who should be given a chance to go over to the side of good. There are a lot of people who justify themselves with the best of intentions. I am categorically against forgiveness, but national-party defamation is unacceptable. It shouldn’t be. Let everyone decide who they are with: do they support this new system, are they for this new power, power without corruption?

I repeat: I am not advocating for the idea of total forgiveness. The lesson of 1991 is before our eyes: people wanted to get rid of the rotten and deceitful elite, hiding behind communist ideals, and save a great country. As a result, the USSR was destroyed, but the elite remained in power, abandoned ethical constraints, and collaborated to produce a self-serving system of privatization of national wealth.

And let me emphasize: this does not mean indiscriminate plantings and “witch hunts.” Lustration is a compromise, an agreement: you are no longer trying to manage us, and we are not interested in the affairs that you were involved in when you were at the helm. It cannot be selective, but must cover all people of a certain status voluntarily obtained by them: say, in 1991 it could be members and employees of the apparatus of the CPSU or Communist Party of the Soviet Union committees at all levels.

The level of confrontation and mutual distrust in society has now exceeded all reasonable limits. It is impossible to restore citizens’ trust in bureaucrats without lustration. But everything must be done so that as many officials, functionaries, and other servants of power as possible come to their senses and come over to the side of good. They need to lend a hand, not hide behind false principles.

19. What happens to the existing military once Putin is gone and there is a new interim president?

Those who committed atrocities in Ukraine, in Syria, in Georgia, and in Chechnya should be given to the international court for a fair trial. As for the rest—I see the Russian military reformed to the standards of NATO and becoming part of the organization.

20. What happens to all the oligarchs and all of Putin's supporters once he is gone and there is a new interim president and government?

Supporters—it is not an official position or title. The same is true for the oligarchs. Members of United Russia and Putin's government structures should be lustrated—not punished, but restricted from getting any government jobs or government financing in the future. As for large businesses—if they made money by themselves, we will praise and encourage them. If they made money by illegal privatization and/or other benefits and gifts from the state—such deals will be reversed. And we will definitely be watching to ensure that no large business can become oligarchic, by restricting their control over media and political parties and restricting their access to actual government influence.

21. How can the Russian people be sure that you, as the interim president, won't turn out to be another Putin? Or another Yeltsin? Or someone who will decide you should be "president" for life?

The interim president (or rather the leader of the revolutionary government) must agree to stay at the helm only for a short, clearly defined period of time. And also agree at the same time to never participate in the political system again as a player in the future political system, or leading any political party or taking part in any elections. These agreements will be bound by contract and law. As you know from reading this far, I propose that the revolutionary government serve in that capacity for a period of two years. When the transition period is over, the whole body will follow the law and automatically step down. This ensures the new Constitution and new laws will not be drafted to support the interim leader's personal ambitions and plans, like Yeltsin and Putin did.

22. How can the Russian people be sure this "new plan" won't just be another failure like the plans they got from Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin?

Gorbachev and Yeltsin were party apparatchiks. Putin was a KGB officer selected by party apparatchik. How could we expect they would deliver on democratic reforms? I am proposing that democracy should be built by people themselves represented by individuals of a strong freedom fighter background.

23. Logistically, how does this work . . . what happens on the day Putin is gone? And what happens the day after that? And the day after that?

It is tempting to say, "Oh, it will happen like this, and this, and this. Then this will happen and then this will happen and then this will happen."

But that's not how a revolution works. Yes, there is a plan. Will I tell you the plan? Of course not.

And will the plan be executed exactly as written? Of course not.

Broadly speaking, what will happen is that the Russian people themselves will take to the streets and take to the internet and demand change and new leadership. Their efforts will be passionately supported by others around the world; and they will also take to the streets and the internet to show their support. The leadership of the Russian peoples' chosen Revolutionary Government will assume the collective leadership of the country. They will appoint the new ministers and the new governors of the regions. On the very first day important decrees on lustration and key reforms of the political system will be announced. The war in Ukraine will stop and the army will retreat to positions of February 2014. Then the process of resetting the country will continue to be initiated.

24. How do we know this isn't yet another "regime change" program being supported by another world superpower?

It is not. Firstly, other countries are quite afraid of Putin and Russian nukes so they are afraid to support regime change just as they have been afraid to cross a red line with Russia in their support of Ukraine. These dramatic changes in Russia are for Russians to make. We were never anyone's puppets and will never be. Period.

25. Besides you and your team, are there others who are also preparing for this?

Yes, many Russians both inside and outside of Russia are getting ready. Many Russians who have left the country are preparing to return. Leaders of other nations are also getting ready. And of course, as we have all seen, people worldwide who are supporting Ukraine are also signaling that they are prepared to support a new Russia that is democratic and follows the rule of law. Meanwhile, most Russians, both in the opposition and in the government and ordinary people are waiting and watching, not yet understanding how they can influence the outcome. Others, including myself, are actively fighting; and an immensely important part of our job is to show the people what we must do next together.

Meanwhile, in November 2022, the First Congress of People's Deputies of Russia will be held in Warsaw. The delegates of this Congress will be elected officials who served Russia at different times and different levels, but all of whom have rejected Russia's war against Ukraine since it began in 2014.

As a summary of the objectives of this First Congress:

- Adoption of the Declaration on the Constitutional Principles of Free Russia after the overthrow of the Putin regime. This Declaration will become the foundation of the new Russian Constitution in the future;
- Adoption of a list of priority decisions to be made by the post-Putin Russian government;
- Adoption of a National Resistance Act defining the procedure for the self-organization and legal framework of the resistance movement in Russia and abroad.

You can find out more about the First Congress of People's Deputies of Russia at <http://rusdep.org>

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