

THE TIME BEFORE CONFRONTATION

Meduza had a piece yesterday sourced to “a source close to the Russian government and one of the sources close to the Kremlin” that claims Putin’s crowd was *more interested* in seeing Kamala Harris get elected, followed by another January 6, than seeing Trump win.

In the lead-up to the U.S. presidential election, the Kremlin’s political team hoped the results might spark protests reminiscent of the January 2021 riot at the Capitol, insiders told Meduza.

“Society there is even more polarized now, and back then, protests escalated to the point of storming the Capitol. Protests could have been a logical outcome of that polarization [after this election]. The main bet wasn’t so much on any particular candidate winning but on the losing side refusing to accept the results,” said a source close to Putin’s administration. Another Kremlin insider confirmed this account.

According to these sources, the Kremlin hoped such a crisis would force American authorities to focus on domestic issues rather than their standoff with Russia.

I’m not sure how much I buy this, but it’s a useful reminder that Russia would always prefer to have a weakened puppet than a strong one; Putin’s goal is to destroy the Western world order, not to install an unreliable puppet.

Last month, I had a similar thought about the likelihood of violence: Even if Harris had a 50% chance of winning, I still thought there was a 10% chance that political violence would disrupt the transfer of power.

This is the kind of timing I can’t get

out of my head. According to FiveThirtyEight, Kamala Harris currently has a 53% chance of winning the electoral college. That's bleak enough. But based on everything I know about January 6, I'd say that if Trump loses, there's at least a 10% chance Trump's fuckery in response will have a major impact on the transfer of power.

There was even a point on election day, when Stephen Miller and Charlie Kirk were imploring bros to get out to vote and Trump was tweeting out false claims of cheating in Philadelphia, where it seemed that *Trump* had started to kick off that second plan, stealing power again.

And then, instead, he won.

It took a bit of time before Putin publicly congratulated Trump, as if he were waiting to see if there *would* be political violence.

Viktor Orbán, though, is doing victory laps.



Orbán Viktor ✓ @PM_ViktorOrban · 11h

Mar-a-Lago calling. Just had my first phone conversation with President @realDonaldTrump since the elections. We have big plans for the future!

It has always been clear that Trump's plan – or that of his more competent handlers – was Orbanism. It was right there, out in public, perhaps most symbolically in Orbán's ties to Heritage and Project 2025 and CPAC's Hungarian wing, but the implications of such ties were among the things that journalists and editors believed to be less important than Joe Biden's stutter.

We know Trump's more competent handlers will try to use zeno- and transphobia as a means to grab for more power. We know they will privilege and try to force Christianity, a mix of Evangelical and regressive Catholic doctrine. We know they'll try to disempower universities and the press; tellingly, the GOP House has *already* had tremendous success in doing both with little discussion that that was what was going on. We

know Trump will replace what Rule of Law the US has with a cronyism. We know they'll turn the Deep State into the bogeyman they claim it was, a tool against America rather than one ostensibly used to protect it. We know oligarchs like Musk will begin eating away at the state.

What's not clear is how they'll implement it.

There was a moment, I guess, when the Kremlin, Trump, and I thought it might be political violence. Now it's unclear what manufactured emergency will be used to push through authoritarian powers, though your best guess is an authoritarian crackdown *in response to* protests of an immediate turn to mass deportations. Notably, Johny McEntee is back in charge of personnel, and he used a willingness to invoke the Insurrection Act as a litmus test at the end of the last Trump Administration.

Rather than having immediate political violence with Joe Biden and governors calling out the National Guard, we have two months to understand what's coming, figure out what tools and points of pressure we have, and try to undercut their most obvious plans.

This is one value, for example, of advance warning of things like a Special Counsel report on Trump's crimes; it tells us that, rather than a symbolic firing on January 20, we're going to get something that might feed media attention for a few hours before that, something that might even provide a focus for Democrats as they try to demonstrate Republican complicity with Trump. There are likely to be symbolic firings a few days down the line in any case, but *those* symbolic firings may serve as a way to make visible an assault on Civil Service protection. Sally Yates has been revered for years by people who are otherwise unfamiliar with her work because she took a stand against Trump's first power grab, and it's likely you don't yet know the name of the person who will play that role this time. It won't be adequate, but better to know to expect it than let it go to waste.

Had things gone differently on Tuesday, we would likely be in immediate crisis right now, as authorities tried to shut down political violence. Instead we have two months to assess what tools we have.