



**Gabriel Gatehouse** @ggatehouse Mon Feb 28 12:16:16 +0000 2022

A thread on Russia

It will be becoming clear to those around Putin, the first and second tier of 'siloviki' (security apparatus), oligarchs and technocrats that make up the 'greater Kremlin', that whatever happens with this war, things will never go back to normal under the same leadership: ie Russian politicians who rant and rail against the West at home while at the same time hiding their stolen cash in the West and enjoying their European holidays in their villas in Tuscany and the south of France,

their yachts mooring at exotic destinations around the world, their children getting expensive educations at British private schools. That is over. The potentates and princelings of the greater Kremlin are today contemplating their future and asking themselves:

Do I want to live in a vast replica of North Korea, completely cut off from the rest of the world. I think Putin, if he isn't too divorced from reality to understand this, has made his choice. He is prepared for total isolation.

To be the leader of a wounded and aggrieved nation in permanent conflict with the rest of the world. There may be a few, especially among the 'siloviki' (the most powerful) who are willing to go down this road with him.

But many, I suspect, are not. They like the life they've built up over the past two decades of self-enrichment and they will be wondering to themselves: can we somehow maintain any of this? And if so can we do it under our present leader?

If they conclude they can't, then they face a huge and terrifying choice: to get out (to where?); to go down with the ship; or.... To try to replace the captain. But - and this is the real problem...

Putin's genius over the past two decades has been to turn himself into the structural institution through which power is exercised in Russia. He is in many ways no longer a person but an institution. The tree trunk that holds all the branches of the greater Kremlin in place.

They will be thinking to themselves: can we remove this tree trunk without bringing the whole structure crashing down? Can we do it quickly and cleanly, without infighting with massively unpredictable consequences?

A very few may be whispering these thoughts very quietly to trusted friends, if they have such things. For they know that to make a move on Putin, you have to succeed. The price of failure is very high indeed.

In Russia, change happens rarely but suddenly. Windows of opportunity are small and come along only once in a few decades. This may well be one of those windows. But it is fraught with danger.

Plus live updates in Ukrainian <https://t.co/iu1Wn1T4Vr> and Russian <https://t.co/Z7PF0gkdYp>)