



Russia's Precarious Olympics

By Leon Aron

Every Olympiad is a complex and, until the end, uncertain endeavor. In the case of the 2014 Winter Games, which begin February 7 in Sochi, Russia, the challenges and vulnerabilities are far more significant and numerous than usual. It will be the first (and almost certainly the last) Winter Games in the subtropics. Virtually the entire infrastructure had to be built from scratch and in haste, with abuse of laborers and corruption overhead likely further compromising the construction. While various interest groups exploit every Olympiad to draw international attention to their causes, protests in Sochi could be particularly intense. Finally, and most ominously, Sochi is next door to a fundamentalist Islamic uprising in which terrorism claims victims almost daily. For the sake of the athletes and millions of fans, one hopes that none of these potential problems will precipitate a disruption, much less a crisis or bloodshed. Yet in their choice of location and the manner in which they have gone about organizing the Games, the Russian authorities have greatly increased that risk. By highlighting some key features and practices of Vladimir Putin's regime, a major setback at the Olympiad could deal a serious blow to the regime's legitimacy, prompt national soul searching, and trigger another round of civil resistance in search of reforms.

The most powerful explanation for the choices the Russian authorities made in putting together the 2014 Sochi Olympiad is that, from the very beginning, it has been Russian President Vladimir Putin's personal project. Despite an array of obvious disadvantages, potential risks, and dangers, these Games are in Sochi because this is where Putin wanted them to be held.

As is usual in such cases, the personal blended with the political. By all accounts, Putin loves the area. Krasnaya Polyana, the skiing and snowboarding venue for the Games, is his favorite ski resort.¹ Having these Olympics in Sochi is to become the vindication of his (effectively) 12 years in power; "Russia's rising off its knees," in the ubiquitous official propaganda cliché; and the recovery of great-power status after the postrevolutionary chaos of the 1990s. A leading Russian political sociologist called the Olympiad the "most prestigious undertaking of Russia's present regime."² In this pursuit, no effort was to be too strenuous, no climate too warm, no

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Key points in this Outlook:

- The 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, are an intensely personal—and extremely expensive—endeavor for Russian President Vladimir Putin and may become a moment of truth for the Russian people and for the Kremlin.
- Challenges facing these Olympic Games include subtropical winter weather, hastily constructed infrastructure, potential protests that may turn unruly or even violent, and terror attacks from a nearby jihad.
- A major disruption at the Olympics could highlight the government's questionable practices leading up to the Games and fuel discontent with the Putin regime.

terrorist threat too immediate, and, of course, no amount of state treasure too large to ensure the Games' success.

Putin's involvement has loomed large from the beginning. In July 2007, he flew to Guatemala to lobby the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which he addressed in English, something he almost never does in public. Putin told the IOC members about ancient Greeks who once lived around Sochi and how the rock to which, according to an ancient Greek legend, the gods chained Prometheus for giving men fire is in the area. He then associated the Promethean fire with the Olympic torch to argue why Russia was the logical place to light it. He ended his presentation in French. The vote that followed went for Russia 51 to 47 over the South Korean city of Pyeongchang. On hearing the news, a large Russian delegation, with Putin beaming in the front row, erupted in ovation and began to throw snow in the air.

Putin's hand was also obvious in personnel management. In 2008, he put one of his most trusted aides, Dmitry Kozak, in charge of the Olympic preparations, creating a deputy prime minister position specifically for that purpose. A former first deputy chief of staff in the presidential administration with a reputation as a tireless, skillful, and successful manager, Kozak previously was dispatched by Putin to be the presidential "plenipotentiary representative" in Russia's most violent Southern federal district, which at that time included the North Caucasus.

Putin also appointed as head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) counterintelligence department General Oleg Syromolotov, despite the latter's lack of antiterrorism experience. The most likely reason is that in the KGB, which Putin joined in his early 20s, and in its successor agency, the FSB, he Putin headed in 1998–99, counterintelligence officers were considered to be the elite: most competent, most loyal, and least corrupt. And after the first head of Olympstroy, the government agency in charge of the Games, resigned after 14 months on the job, Putin hired and fired two successors before stopping at the fourth in February 2011.³

Putin's close involvement in the preparations for the Games has been further highlighted by his frequent and widely publicized visits to Sochi. During one inspection, in February 2013, he berated Kozak on primetime television for the delay in the completion of the ski jump and then effectively proceeded, on the air, to fire the vice chairman of the national Olympic Committee, who was responsible for the construction.

"The First Spring Olympics"

Located on the Black Sea coast on the same latitude as the famous French Mediterranean resort of Nice, Sochi is the warmest place in Russia and its most popular summer resort. Palm and banana trees are everywhere. The daily high in Sochi in February is usually between 40 and 62 degrees Fahrenheit.⁴

The subtropical climate poses an obvious risk for the open-air events in the Caucasus Mountains 30 miles away. The temperature at the Krasnaya Polyana ski resort, which at 560 meters above sea level will serve as the base for the mountain events, is often in the 40s in February.⁵ Higher in the mountains, the multiyear February average reached below freezing only at 1,800 meters (5,900 feet) above sea level. Russian wits have begun calling the Games "the first Spring Olympics in history."⁶

Another potential pitfall is the notorious volatility of a subtropical climate. A year minus a day before the opening of the Olympiad, on February 6, 2013, it was raining "hard"—not just in Sochi, where it was 54°F, but also in the mountains, where the temperature was 46°F.⁷ A week later, the World Cup free-ski and snowboard slopestyle competitions had to be canceled "due to lack of snow and continuous warm and rainy weather conditions."⁸ However, the organizers claimed this past October that they had already stored 30,000 cubic meters (over 1 million cubic feet) of snow and would accumulate an additional 420,000 cubic meters (almost 15 million cubic feet) before the Games began.⁹

The "Most Challenging" Olympics in History

Likely never before in the history of Winter Olympics has the infrastructure gap between what was available and what is needed been as wide as it was when Russia won the Olympic bid. After visiting Sochi in spring 2008, former champion skier and head of the IOC's coordinating committee Jean-Claude Killy said it was "probably the most challenging Olympics ever as far as what has to be built to deliver these Olympic Games."¹⁰ Taking another look in winter 2009, Killy was even more emphatic, calling Sochi "the most difficult task of all time" and adding that "we can't afford to lose, another day, another hour, even another second."¹¹

In addition to seven "ice palaces" for indoor events and two Olympic parks, what has been called "Europe's biggest building site" is to include 40 new and refurbished hotels, 220 miles of new or reconstructed roads, 125 miles of rail

tracks, 16 miles of 12 tunnels cut through the mountains, 70 bridges, a new seaport, and a hospital.¹² Gas and sewer lines had to be laid, and a new power station was needed to boost electricity supply.

From the beginning, the already-record cost estimates began to escalate. Less than a year after Russia submitted a \$10 billion assessment as part of the winning bid to hold the Games, the projection rose to \$13 billion. (The three most recent winter Olympiads cost, respectively, \$1.2 billion, \$3.6 billion, and \$7 billion.) The first of the four presidents of Olymstroy resigned after reportedly telling Putin that the budget expenditures could triple.¹³

In 2010, the projected price tag reached \$30 billion—at which point then–prime minister Putin signed a decree excluding the Sochi Games from the list of state programs and thus the purview of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Development.¹⁴ A year later, President Dmitri Medvedev estimated the expenditures at \$43 billion. By early 2013, Kozak put costs at \$51 billion, making the Sochi Games the most expensive Olympiad in history—and more expensive than all previous winter Olympics *combined*.¹⁵ (Estimates by the regime’s critics run \$4 billion higher still.)

The tab was supposed to be shared with some of Russia’s top billionaire oligarchs and their companies as though it were a kind of *noblesse oblige* imposed by the tsar on the richest boyars. The burden fell mostly on Vladimir Potanin of Interros and Oleg Deripaska of RUSAL, as well as the Kremlin’s habitual cash cow and the world’s largest natural gas company, Gazprom. Yet 70 percent of “private” investments were said to be covered by loans from state-owned bank Vnesheconombank (VEB).¹⁶ Still, nonstate investors have publicly and repeatedly complained of the allegedly crushing financial burden and the dwindling prospects of ever earning their investments back. Potanin and Deripaska asked for more state money to finish construction on time, and VEB reportedly upped its coverage to 90 percent of the so-called private investments.¹⁷

The Corruption Overhead

The staggering cost overruns were not due solely to the enormous scale of construction and a difficult mountain terrain. As virtually everywhere in Russia today, corruption “overhead” (mostly in the form of kickbacks, or *otkaty*) from contractors to government officials has been a major cost inflator. In at least one case, the owner of a construction company went public, complaining in June 2010 to

President Medvedev about being harassed by the deputy head of construction in the Office of Presidential Affairs *after* the businessman had kicked back the agreed-upon 12 percent (\$50 million) of the contract’s cost.¹⁸

The built-in price of *otkaty* has combined with waste expected of Russian government-run projects of such magnitude and favoritism and lack of transparency in awarding of contracts to produce the Sochi Olympics’ record price tag.¹⁹ For example, the cost of the ski jump complex, over which Putin fired that top official, went from \$40 million to \$265 million. The combined 28-mile highway and railroad link from the coastal cluster of venues in Sochi to the Krasnaya Polyana Olympic village in the mountains will end up costing at least \$8.2 billion. According to the Russian edition of *Esquire* magazine, for that amount of money the highway portion of the project could have been paved with mink furs.²⁰ (The magazine also estimated that a new road in Sochi could have been paved with nine inches of foie gras or three and half inches of Louis Vuitton handbags.)

Russia’s Audit Chamber, the Russian parliament’s watchdog, has estimated that state-run companies have misspent more than \$500 million in Sochi. The government’s critics estimate the stolen and wasted funds at around \$30 billion.²¹

In 2010, after Putin fired the third head of Olymstroy, the government began 27 separate criminal investigations into the alleged embezzlement. Although no one has been brought to trial thus far (and probably will not be until after the Olympiad), since then a slew of new cases have been opened, including those against the mayor of Sochi and his key deputies and the former director general of the Krasnaya Polyana company, who was placed under house arrest.²²

Laborer Abuse

The quality and reliability of construction may have been further compromised by the working conditions of over 16,000 migrant workers, mostly from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Turkey, and Serbia. Their average pay was the equivalent of \$1.80–\$2.60 an hour, or around \$605 a month.²³ Many laborers were not paid regularly or even went unpaid for months. Complaints to the authorities went mostly unanswered, and those daring to protest were fired, saw their passports confiscated, or were deported.²⁴ In desperation, one man sewed his mouth shut to protest nonpayment of himself and 30 of his fellow workers.²⁵

Interviewed by Human Rights Watch, workers reported 12-hour workdays seven days a week, with no vacations. Food provided by the employers was bad, and several dozen workers were reported to share a single-family house with one bathroom. One worker claimed to live in a house with about 200 men, with 14 people sleeping in a 36-square-meter (118-square-foot) room.²⁶

Evictions and Displacement

For many of Sochi's 335,000 residents, Olympic construction has been an almost incessant hassle, while others have been subject to property rights violations and evictions. Last year, people in central Sochi went for months without running water, and power outages occurred almost daily as the existing pipelines and power lines were dug up or cut through to accommodate new construction. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of properties have been condemned and demolished, and at least 2,000 families evicted.²⁷ In the rush to complete construction, the demolition crews sometimes tore down houses without bothering to check if there were people inside.²⁸

Compensation for lost buildings was calculated at a hundred times lower than the market value—and even that money, according to some residents, was pocketed by the authorities.²⁹ In addition, many landlords lost their main source of livelihood; with few jobs to be had in Sochi, earnings from renting rooms to summer beachgoers is essential for survival.³⁰

Many of the displaced find themselves in “monstrous conditions” as the local authorities have provided no alternative living arrangements, citing a lack of funds.³¹ In some cases, the authorities refused to pay any compensation for destroyed homes, claiming that they had been “illegally constructed,” although the government had for years collected real estate taxes on these properties.³²

Despoiled Environment

Despite the “zero waste” guarantees that Russia submitted in its bid book and its promise of the “greenest Olympics ever,” the World Wildlife Fund has found that “irreparable damage has been done to the unique ecosystem.”³³ Activists from Environmental Watch on North Caucasus claim that the Games have destroyed the Imeretinskaya Valley, where Sochi is located, between the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains.³⁴ Thousands of hectares of forest were cut down within Sochi National Park, which is supposed to be protected by Russian law, and on the territory of the Western

Caucasus United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization World Heritage site. Massive deforestation and tunneling through mountains along the route of the Adler-Krasnaya Polyana railway and highway have threatened endangered species and increased the threat of landslides, erosion, and avalanches. The United Nations Environment Program has criticized Russia for ignoring the construction's effect on the region's wildlife.³⁵

Builders have dumped toxic waste from construction sites into the Mzymta River and in the Akhshtyr crater near Sochi.³⁶ In addition to degrading a scenic spot, the Akhshtyr junkyard, which is filled with heavy metals, threatens to poison the city water supply and seep into the sea.³⁷ Environmental Watch on North Caucasus and the Sochi Law and Order movement have unsuccessfully led the protests to stop the dumping.³⁸

Circassian and LGBT Protesters

Most modern Olympiads have been exploited by interest groups to publicize their demands. Sochi will be no exception. Yet the intensity of the potential protests coupled with the traditional heavy-handedness of the Russian authorities in handling demonstrations creates one more potential vulnerability of the Games.

In addition to human rights defenders, environmental activists, and disgruntled locals, two groups are especially likely to precipitate disruptions. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists intend to draw attention to the 2013 Russian law that bans “propaganda of homosexuality to children.” This legislation defines “propaganda” so broadly that it effectively criminalizes the subject of homosexuality in mass media, online, or at public events, such as gay pride parades.³⁹

In response, groups like Queer Nation, All Out, and Athlete Ally have claimed the IOC had “sold out the lesbian and gay community in Russia,” and called for a boycott of the Games.⁴⁰ To encourage protests, Athlete Ally and All Out have launched the Principle Six Campaign, which is named after the article in the Olympics Charter that bans discrimination. As of December, three dozen US Olympians had declared their support.⁴¹ Russian LGBT activists plan to defy the ban and hold a gay pride parade on February 7, the opening day of the Games. “We are now showing the whole world that for us to host the Olympic Games is a natural disaster,” said gay rights leader Nikolai Alexeev, apparently referring to the implicit validation of the antigay laws by those agreeing to participate in and watch the Olympiad.⁴²

Another intensely charged protest might come from the descendants of the Circassians, the North Caucasian people who claim Sochi as their capital. During the final phase of Russia's conquest of the Muslim North Caucasus in 1864, 1.5 million Circassians were deported to Turkey. With the Olympiad being held on the 150th anniversary of this expulsion, which they consider a "genocide" responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of their compatriots, Circassian activists in Turkey, Syria, Jordan, and the United States have called for Russia's recognition of and apology for the 1864 expulsion and for a boycott of the Games.⁴³

The unacknowledged historic injustice against the Circassian people was recently highlighted by the plight of their compatriots in the civil war in Syria, home to 150,000 Circassians. Furthermore, neighboring Georgia officially recognized the expulsion of the Circassians as a genocide in 2011, and outgoing Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili mentioned the atrocity in his address to the United Nations General Assembly in September. With over 700,000 Circassians living in the North Caucasus, activists are demanding the same leading role for the representatives of the Circassian people in the opening ceremonies as was accorded to indigenous people during the Vancouver Olympiad—a demand that Moscow has rejected.⁴⁴

Jihad Next Door

By far the greatest manmade threat to the 2014 Winter Olympics is terrorist violence. A Russian deputy stated recently that Russia ranks fourth or fifth in the world in number of victims of terrorist attacks.⁴⁵ According to Russian experts, 98 percent of all terrorist acts in Russia occur in the North Caucasus, in the immediate proximity of Sochi. Between January and September 2013, the jihad aimed at detaching the North Caucasus from Russia to establish a North Caucasian caliphate left 375 dead and 343 injured.⁴⁶ Among those killed were more than 100 police and security troops and 200 terrorists.⁴⁷

In the Karachaevo-Cherkessia Autonomous Republic, 55 miles from Sochi, nine "crimes of extremist nature" occurred between January and September 2013. The scope and intensity of terrorism increases eastward: from Kabardino-Balkaria (185 miles from Sochi, 69 attacks during this period) to Ingushetia (256 miles, 30 killed and 47 injured) to Chechnya (300 miles, 47 acts of terrorism) to the hotbed of Islamic militancy, Dagestan (389 miles, 242 incidents).⁴⁸ Dagestan is where the 2012 Boston bombing suspects, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, grew up and where Tamerlan spent half a year shortly before the attack.

In addition, on October 21 of last year, a female suicide bomber from Dagestan killed seven people and injured 50 in the southeast Russian city of Volgograd. Two months later, on December 29 and 30, in the same city suicide bombers killed nearly three dozen people in less than 48 hours.

In Sochi itself, two bombs were detonated in July and August 2008, killing four people and injuring more than 40. Two years later, there was an explosion on the main railway that runs through Sochi less than 10 miles from the city. In May 2012, Russia's National Anti-Terrorism Committee announced confiscation of arms, ammunition, self-made bombs, land mines, mortars, and grenade launchers in the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia (formerly part of Georgia), 24 miles away from Sochi.⁴⁹ The authorities claimed that the cache belonged to the "Abkhaz Jamaat," which was planning attacks during the Olympiad.⁵⁰

On July 3, 2013, Doku Umarov, the alleged leader of the North Caucasian jihad and self-declared emir of the Caucasus Emirate, posted a YouTube video in which he called on fellow jihadists to "do their utmost to derail" what he called "satanic dances on the bones of many many Muslims killed . . . and buried on our lands extending to the Black Sea," and declared it their "obligation to use all means to prevent this."⁵¹

The credibility of Umarov's threat is enhanced by Russia's position in the Syrian civil war. The FSB estimates that at least 400 men from Russia fought with al Qaeda in Syria. Russia's unwavering support of Bashar Assad's regime with weapons and diplomacy is reported to have angered many. "Muslims all over the world revile Putin for his support of Assad," a Dagestani man who studied at a religious school in Damascus, told a reporter.⁵²

On July 30, a Russian-speaking Syrian jihadi warlord posted a YouTube clip in which he called on the volunteers from the North Caucasus to "prepare for the so-called Olympics Games in Sochi." "For such a jihad," he went on, "two people is enough."⁵³ According to a former deputy commander of Russia's elite special forces Alpha unit, "If they get reinforcement from Syria, our security services will be hard put to prevent them from ruining the Olympics."⁵⁴ This past September, Putin admitted that the fighters returning from Syria were "a very real threat."⁵⁵

A Special Ops Olympics?

Aware of the enormous risks that the choice of location poses for the Games, the Russian authorities have

committed mammoth resources to minimize danger. The result has been an antiterrorist operation unprecedented for Russia in depth and scope. Never before has there been an Olympiad as saturated by security personnel, as thoroughly monitored by video and listening devices, or as riddled by cybersnooping as Sochi will be.

Building on the security experience of other Games, especially the 2012 London Summer Olympics, the Russian authorities plan to deploy between 37,000 and 42,000 police, as well as at least 10,000 Ministry of Internal Affairs troops and an unspecified numbers of elite paratroopers and FSB agents.⁵⁶ High-speed patrol boats and sonars to detect submarines will be guarding Sochi from the sea. A special detachment of veterans of the two Chechen wars and antiterrorist operations in the North Caucasus will patrol the wooded Caucasus Mountains, and an unknown number of FSB border troops will concentrate on the routes likely to be used by fighters returning from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria.⁵⁷

The authorities will operate 5,500 Israeli-made surveillance cameras.⁵⁸ Robotic vehicles will be searching for explosives and, for the first time in Olympic history, small spy drones, weighing nine pounds and capable of staying in the air for 90 minutes at a time, will hover over key venues.⁵⁹

Yet the key distinction of the Sochi Olympics is the universality and depth of cyberspying, which puts everyone in Sochi under what some Russian analysts call an electronic dome: a cyberspace completely transparent to and penetrated by the authorities.⁶⁰ On November 8, 2013, Medvedev signed a decree authorizing the government to collect data on telephone calls and Internet contacts made by the Games' organizers, athletes, and foreign journalists. The list of targets includes the members of the International Olympics and Paralympics Committees, the World Anti-Doping Agency, the Court of Arbitration for Sport, national Olympic committees of the participating countries, athletes, team doctors, and event referees and judges.⁶¹ (The information collected will be stored for three years, and the Federal Security Service will have around-the-clock remote access to the subscribers' database.)

This practice radically widens the application of Russia's premier tool of secret surveillance: the System of Operational and Investigative Measures (Russian acronym SORM). Since 2010, Russian telecommunications and Internet providers have been required to install Omega, the latest version of the SORM equipment, at their own expense. Failing to do so subjects them to

finances, as happened to several local providers in the Sochi region. Russian experts have concluded that the "new and improved" SORM is capable of intercepting not just emails but "absolutely all information" that a user transmits via social networks, chats, and Skype.⁶²

While Sochi is supposed to boast the fastest free Wi-Fi of all the Olympiads, wireless service providers have modified their equipment per the FSB's specifications, which include handling encrypted traffic. Internet users who hope to protect their communications by using non-Russian sites and relying on the encryption provided by Google, Facebook, and other major Internet platforms are likely to be disappointed. According to independent Russian experts, in March 2013 the Communication Ministry of Russia introduced "SORM Regulations for Internet Service Providers," which specifically mentioned such servers as Gmail and Yahoo as targets for interception.⁶³

"The Russian authorities want to make sure that every connection and every move made online in Sochi during the Olympics will be absolutely transparent to the secret services," concluded an author of the groundbreaking study of electronic surveillance in Sochi. "Sochi has become a testing ground for all measures of electronic surveillance and spying over citizens," added the study's coauthor.⁶⁴

Those who bought tickets to the Games have already had a preview of these measures. In addition to tickets, a "Fan Passport," bearing an individual's name and photograph, will be required to enter the venues. To take the photo, one needs to log on to a site provided by the Russian authorities, which activates the camera on the user's computer. The user is warned that he or she is permitting the site to record activity on the computer's microphone and camera. According to Russian experts, this is tantamount to introducing a computer virus into the system.⁶⁵

A Moment of Truth

The Sochi Olympics has epitomized Putin's "power vertical in its purest form": corruption, growing incompetence, profligacy, lack of public input and of the society's control over the executive, secret police as the country's most powerful institution, the stifling of debate by de facto censorship, and no effective limits to the autocrat's hubristic fiat.⁶⁶

No one would wish disruption or violence on the 2014 Winter Olympics. Yet, should an incident occur, the political damage could be commensurate with the Kremlin's material and symbolic investment in the Olympiad. By

identifying himself with the Games so deeply and closely, Putin has risked more than personal embarrassment. His popularity is central to regime's legitimacy, and at a time when trust in him is already as low as 30 percent (half of what it was in 2008) and support for his policies has dropped to its lowest point in 12 years (47 percent), a failure in Sochi could be devastating.⁶⁷

Less than three and a half years before the opening of the Sochi Olympics, another key developing nation held a giant sporting event where the specter of a fiasco also loomed large. Until the last minute, the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi appeared to be headed for national humiliation amid collapsing bridges and the "uninhabitable" athletes' village, with waste, incompetence, and flagrant and widely publicized corruption as the main culprits.⁶⁸ Although India managed to finish construction by the opening date, the "shocks to the Indian self-image" were reported to be "traumatic" and resulted in an anticorruption backlash that has since become a major and enduring factor in Indian politics.⁶⁹ A new national anticorruption party, Aam Aadmi, has sprung into existence. This past December, the ruling Congress party was defeated by the opposition in assembly elections in four of the country's key states, while Aam Aadmi has won more than two dozen seats in the Delhi state assembly.

The Commonwealth Games cost \$6 billion at most. The Kremlin could be spending nine times that on Sochi—more than twice as much as it spent on education in 2013 and almost 80 percent of that year's health care expenditures.⁷⁰ This in a country where the average monthly pension of \$300 is among the lowest in Europe, the quality of roads ranks 136th of the 144 countries studied, and the life expectancy for men is on par with that of Myanmar, Mongolia, and Guyana.⁷¹

As early as July 2008, the independent Committee for Civic Control warned that if preparation for the Olympic proved inadequate and the money "torn out from the budget to the detriment of the social and economic situation" was wasted, the country would suffer "humiliation" for decades.⁷² The Russian people want to feel proud of their country, an editorial in leading independent newspaper *Vedomosti* claimed last year, but the author argued, "the preparation for the Games is proceeding with our money but without our input," and "what has been built is bound to break."⁷³ In a 2013 national survey, almost two-third of Russians felt that Olympic funds had been spent with little to no effect or "simply stolen."⁷⁴ An opposition columnist declared that the people would not forget how authorities evicted people

from their homes, made money on the construction, and "killed Sochi's unique ecological system."⁷⁵

Designed to legitimize the neoauthoritarian regime, the Sochi Olympics instead could become Russia's moment of truth, prompting soul searching among the people and spurring the movement for democratization.

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