**Poor Vladimir**

Vladimir Putin appears to be having serious problems. In October, it was reported that Covid infections had reached 1.4 million cases and growing by 15,000 a day. The death toll was officially 24,000, but likely downplayed.

While Putin has weakened NATO, Moscow has not benefited in any measurable metric. American sanctions are still a major obstacle to Putin's economic progress. His oligarchs are economically punished by our economic sanctions. His highest priority is to convince the White House to reduce these constraints as our sanctions is a major Putin headache.

American sanctions are believed to have diminished the Russian GDP by 6% since the 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine. The ruble has lost 20% of it value in 2020. Heavily dependent on the price of oil and gas, plunging oil prices and the price war with Saudi Arabia has severely damaged the Russian economy.

Earlier in June 2020, Russian changed its constitution to allow Putin to rule for two more 10 year terms, and allows the Russian dictator more room to be more autocratic and diminish the limited democracy in Russia.

In 2020 Russian interference with American election process was not as effective as in 2016. Always pragmatic, Putin has communicated with President Joe Biden and intimated his support to re-start the START talks. He referred to this resumption of negotiations to be "a very serious element of our potential collaboration in the future."

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**SOURCE:**

**"Putin's Troubles," *the Week*, October 30, 2020, P 13**