Twitter Thread by Sam Greene

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The dust hasn't yet settled, but we can draw some early conclusions from today's protests in #Russia. TL;DR: The Kremlin and the opposition are at a stalemate.

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I don't see reliable nationwide turnout figures, but this feels similar in size & scale to the 2017 Dimon protests, which brought out 60-100k nationwide. This may be bigger. Either way, more than the Kremlin was hoping to see, but probably less than the opposition wanted.

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The Kremlin went to extraordinary lengths to keep people off the streets - including preventive arrests, online censorship, and threats to workers and students - and there's little indication it worked (though, I suppose, turnout could have been even higher).

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The opposition demonstrated that it can turn out significant numbers of people nationwide, even when its leaders are in jail and there is a credible threat of violence.

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Meanwhile, the Kremlin is sticking to the tactics it used against the Moscow protests in the summer of 2019: random but not overwhelming violence, enough to create fears of bodily harm, but not enough to keep people off the streets.

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Gone, then, is the patience that the police showed in the 2011/12 Bolotnaya protests. But they haven't risen to the level of violence and demonstrative retribution that we have seen in Belarus, for example. They're not giving the movement more reasons to mobilize.

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The opposition will take some heart from its ability to mobilize 2017-style numbers in the face of 2019-style violence. But it will also have to grapple with the fact that it doesn't appear to have turned out new constituencies.

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We certainly don't seem to see a broadening coalition of people being brought together by Navalny's appeal, in the way that people of different classes, backgrounds and ideologies have come together against Lukashenka.

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Remember, though, that the cross-cutting coalition in Belarus (h/t @oonuch) didn't take shape overnight. It was galvanized by the sense of injustice and indignation created by the gov't response.

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Much, then, will depend on how the Kremlin cleans up the remainder of the protests and prosecutes the detainees.

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On a related note, we don't seem to be seeing much impact from the high-profile TikTok campaign in support of today's protests. Hard to know whether younger people simply got lost in the crowd or didn't turn out in significant numbers -- but they were certainly not the core.

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The Kremlin will likely now try to make this go away, by releasing most detainees and pursuing only a few targeted prosecutions. But that task will be complicated by the fact that it's holding Navalny.

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Navalny's trial will spark more protests, and there are no good options for the Kremlin. If they let Navalny go, it will set a precedent of bowing to pressure from below. If they imprison him for 3-13 years, protests will likely become angrier and more desperate.

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Meanwhile, Duma elections approach, and the Kremlin will want to head into voting with a demobilized and fractured opposition, rather than one hardened and crystallized through months of protest.

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A bit caveat around all of this: given how widespread these protests were and the distance at which I'm observing, there's a lot I don't know. If you want more detail, I suggest following @OvdInfo.

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In a nutshell, then, we have returned to the status quo ante: The opposition retains but doesn't increase its capacity to mobilize, while the Kremlin retains but doesn't increase its appetite for (or effectiveness of) violence. The 'dance' continues.

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