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By Will Stewart

PUTIN PLOTTING A PROTEST REVENGE

VLADIMIR Putin will take revenge on Russian protesters in the New Year with a major crackdown, a former senior aide predicted yesterday.

The Kremlin strongman may muzzle the media, ban protests, or even cancel the March presidential election, claimed Andrei Illarionov who was Putin's senior economic adviser.

Now a researcher at the Cato Institute in Washington, Illarionov added that Russia may even become embroiled in a military conflict to change the public mood and serve as an excuse to curb the wave of recent street protests.

In a radio interview, he warned: The authorities are busy provoking and discrediting, including the rally organisers, but the most important thing is that they are getting ready for revenge.