

POST ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIA DUMA ELECTIONS



December 6, 2007

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2010

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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COMMISSIONERS

| | |
|---|------|
| | Page |
| Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe | 1 |
| Hon. Mike McIntyre, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe | 6 |
| Hon. Joseph R. Pitts, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe | 7 |

PARTICIPANTS

| | |
|---|----|
| John Finerty, Staff Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe | 15 |
| Sarah Mendelson, Director of the Human Rights and Security Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies | 3 |
| Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Editor of the National Interest and a Senior Fellow of Strategic Studies at the Nixon Center | 7 |
| Paul Goble, Longtime Specialist on the Former Soviet Union and Post-Soviet States for Various Government Agencies | 10 |

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

[The hearing was held at 10 a.m. in room B-318 of the Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Commissioners present: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Mike McIntyre, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and Hon. Joseph R. Pitts, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Panalists present: John Finerty, Staff Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Sarah Mendelson, Director of the Human Rights and Security Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies; Nikolas K. Gvosdev, Editor of the National Interest and a Senior Fellow of Strategic Studies at the Nixon Center; and Paul Goble, Longtime Specialist on the Former Soviet Union and Post-Soviet States for Various Government Agencies.

Mr. HASTINGS. All right, ladies and gentlemen, could we get started, please? I'd appreciate it very much.

In advance to Dr. Mendelson, Mr. Gvosdev, and Mr. Goble, I thank you all for being here with us.

The Rules Committee is meeting this morning, so I'm going to open the proceedings—and this is a briefing—and then, of course, those in the audience and staff and others will keep you all busy. We dearly appreciate the information.

If I may, I do have a statement expressing, among other things, my deep appreciation for all of you that are in attendance. It's more than a pleasure for me to discuss this matter, and I will talk about a few of the particulars and try to be as brief as possible.

Let me extend thanks again to the members of this distinguished panel for finding the time to draw on their expertise as we assess the elections and what they tell us about Russia and where it is heading.

Last Sunday, as all of us in this room know, Russia held elections to the national legislature, the State Duma.

Unfortunately, based on credible reports from numerous sources, including the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, there can be little doubt that Russian authorities used the full

range of so-called administrative resources—intimidation, confiscation of campaign literature and, at times, even physical abuse—to overwhelm the already weak and divided opposition.

According to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe, the elections were not fair and failed to meet many OSCE and Council of Europe standards.

As a result, President Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party will now share the Duma with a small coterie of Communist radical nationalists, who have loyally supported the President in the past, and a so-called opposition party that supports President Putin as well.

Now, suffice it to say that our own electoral practices, meaning the United States electoral practices, have not always been free of irregularities, technological or human.

Nevertheless, we try to learn from our mistakes and try our best to correct them.

That's why, for instance, in 2002 I was an original sponsor of the Help America Vote Act, to help States overcome some voting problems in Federal elections that had become evident over the years, and that was bipartisan and bicameral legislation; in addition to the fact that I chaired—co-chaired the Democratic Caucus that dealt with these problems.

That stemmed from the fact that Florida, by any stretch of the imagination, without laying any accusing fingers—Florida had a flawed election.

I remember—a footnote here—being in Belarus and saying to the foreign minister that coming from Florida, where I witnessed a flawed election, if he had a flawed election in Belarus, I would call it that, and I was the lead election monitor in that election.

With respect to Russia, I want to emphasize that my comments about the overall conduct of the Duma election should not be construed as criticism of the many Russian election officials who carried out their tasks conscientiously, in some cases, under dubious circumstances.

For instance, the Observer Mission from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly noted, quote, "the excellent cooperation," unquote, that it received from electoral authorities.

I would also add that in participating in two Russian elections, including the last Duma elections, it was my personal experience that I was treated courteously and had excellent cooperation from the authorities.

Moreover, there is no doubt that many Russian citizens voted freely and enthusiastically for the Putin-dominated United Russia Party. Indeed, many Russians associate President Putin with Russia's economic progress, political stability, and renewed role abroad.

Against this backdrop, it's a bit mystifying why the authorities go to the lengths they do to further emasculate the already weakened opposition. The same also appears to be the trend when it comes to NGOs as well.

While we'll probably never see a perfect election, genuine democracies, as opposed to the illiberal ones, do not intentionally make mockeries of their electoral process.

The Russian people deserve better than the heavy-handed approach witnessed before and during these elections.

As a signatory to the Helsinki Final Act, Russia is obliged to bring its electoral policies and practices into conformity with its OSCE commitments.

Russian people deserve elections that meet Russia's various international commitments such as the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent documents.

While we'll probably, again, not see the kind of elections that we would like, it doesn't mean that we should not strive to undertake the Helsinki mandates.

As the dust settles on the Duma elections and the Presidential elections looming in March, we may get a better idea of President Putin's future role in Russia's future political constellation and to what extent he intends to influence, if not dominate, his country's policy.

This leads to other important questions, like Machiavelli's Prince. Is the future good for the Russian people really inextricably linked to what is good for Putin?

What do the elections and the results reveal about Russia today, both the political leadership and the average Russian citizen?

Do the recent Duma elections in Russia really matter, given that the legislature has so little power?

What do these elections portend for Russia's future? What may be their effect on United States-Russia relations? What questions should we be asking about Russia today that we are not? In other words, where is Russia going?

Our guests today are uniquely qualified to answer these questions and many others that will undoubtedly arise after their presentations.

If you have not done so yet, ladies and gentlemen, I would encourage that you avail yourself of the opportunity to pick up copies of the curriculum vitae and biographies of our distinguished panel. They're on the card table outside.

After their presentations, I'll open with a few questions and then turn the microphone over to my colleagues and the audience.

I guess ladies are first, so we'll start with Dr. Mendelson. You have the floor.

Dr. MENDELSON. Thank you very much, Chairman Hastings. Thank you for inviting me to participate today. My name is Sarah Mendelson, and it's an honor to be here.

I want to focus on three issues: First, where I see Russia today politically; what the Putin ideological platform looks like and its particular appeal for young Russians; and third, what the major policy dilemmas are for U.S. and European policymakers given this ideological platform.

At this time, I'd like to submit my prepared statement for the record, and for the remainder of the time I'm going to summarize a few main points.

If I may, I'd like to begin on a personal note. I've spent the better part of nearly 14 years working alongside many brave colleagues to support the development of democracy and human rights in Russia.

Over a dozen years ago, I worked in the Moscow offices of the National Democratic Institute. I've observed nearly every post-Soviet Russian election.

I was the expert adviser in the fall of 2003 to the election monitoring team from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at the OSCE during their needs assessment phase for the last round of national elections in Russia, something that didn't happen this time.

I'm well aware of how imperfect previous elections have been. I've been monitoring a range of human rights abuses in Russia for nearly a decade. In other words, I've not been exactly sanguine about the state of democracy and human rights in Russia.

Some commentators have said that the events of last Sunday are signs of a robust democratic Russia. I believe nothing could be further from the truth. I regard the events of the last several months, weeks and days as a qualitative shift.

The comprehensive nature, the brazenness and the impunity with which the Putin administration executed the events of last Sunday, coupled with the other assaults on people and institutions we associate with democracy over the last several years, to my mind truly mark a new stage in Russia's post-Soviet trajectory.

While I don't want to give up on the dream of a democratic Russia embedded in the Euro-Atlantic community, that dream does, for the time being, seem to have been interrupted.

On what do I base this gloomy assessment? We're all waiting to see whether President Putin stays in power and for how long. I want to suggest today that this preoccupation which is, of course, understandable, masks a larger dynamic inside Russia.

As the eminent Soviet-era dissident Sergei Kovalev has observed recently in the New York Review of Books, Putin now stands for an entire set of policies and a web of political concepts generated in the bowels of the KGB.

At CSIS, we have representative national survey data from 2005 and 2007 on young Russians, 16-year-olds to 29-year-olds. We find these young Russians are very enthusiastic about Putin's ideological platform.

These young people were born between 1976 and 1991. They are the Putin generation. What I find striking is that they could have been the Helsinki generation or the fall-of-the-Berlin-Wall generation.

And instead, we find a generation that is not bound together by international human rights norms and democracy as core values. Instead, they favor the restoration of a hyper-sovereign Russia that remains outside the Euro-Atlantic community and resists or rejects international legal norms.

So what I'm saying is that even if Putin himself left the national stage today, his views will live on in this generation for quite some time.

Now, just quickly, the first building block in this national concept is the production of Soviet nostalgia, a systematic effort to restore a sense of pride in the putative accomplishments of the Soviet Union and to link this pride to the current Russian state.

In our surveys, we see majorities of young people today agree with President Putin when he says, "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century." We also find that young Russians believe that Stalin did, "more good than bad."

The rewriting of history effaces historical memory and I would argue it facilitates Russia's development as an authoritarian state.

The second building block we see is the manufacturing of enemies within and outside of Russia. Kremlin authorities and Putin himself repeatedly invoke anxiety among the population concerning the dangers of foreign influence.

More recently, official rhetoric has turned explicitly anti-American. An important organization we believe helping to manufacture this belief in enemies, and therefore one that deserves to be monitored, is the Kremlin-supported youth group Nashi.

Given that young Russians are generally apathetic and apolitical, we were really surprised to find a jump in awareness of this group and a desire to join it's ranks when we compared 2005 and our 2007 survey data.

So my expectations for the near future are that the political space will continue to shrink steadily inside Russia. Foreign assistance will continue to come under some attack. I would look for nationalist and xenophobic sentiments to grow.

We are seeing some selective signs that Web sites are being affected. And I will tell you that even some foreign news outlets are becoming nervous.

The other night I had quite an extraordinary experience where the BBC decided that it was too risky to have experts comment on political events in Russia on it's Friday evening broadcast around the world because the network had been given instructions by the Russian Central Election Commission.

They were nervous about violating local election laws. This anxiety temporarily yet effectively silenced them on these issues.

Now, policymakers in the United States and Europe need to calibrate their approach to Russia based on where Russia is today politically rather than where we wanted Russia to be on the Soviet Union collapsed.

And if you accept my argument that the dream of a democratic Russia is, for the time being, over, then that reality raises several very delicate and interconnected policy dilemmas for the United States and Europe.

Chief among them: How can we avoid a new Cold War? Putin's Russia is not the Soviet Union. Russia does not currently, I would argue, pose an existential threat to the United States, despite its weapons of mass destruction.

There is no inherent reason why at this moment a return to the Cold War is necessary or likely. Yet the ambiguous nature of the relationship, where Russia is not exactly friend yet not exactly foe, is politically difficult to navigate, especially when Russia seeks to balance against American and European interests. And that's a phenomenon I predict we'll encounter more and more.

Moreover, Russia has exerted greater influence on the international human rights and democracy machinery than the reverse.

I believe there's an urgent need to address the Russian government's divide-and-conquer strategies with regard to numerous international organizations, not only the OSCE but the United Nations Security Council, the Council of Europe, and even the European Union, to name a few.

There's also an urgent need to generate recommendations and political will to repair the weakened human rights monitoring capacity of these organizations.

When Russia demands special rules or departs from accepted norms such as international election observation conducted by the OSCE, then member states should respond accordingly, as they should for all member states.

The United States ought to coordinate its strategy with European member states on such matters. This brings me to consider how we should continue to engage Russia on issues related to human rights, and I believe that we should continue to engage.

First, assistance should not end for the important groups in Russian society that will surely see none of the oil wealth—human rights NGOs in particular.

But I would argue U.S. assistance requires radical restructuring, and that restructuring needs to be based, really, on listening and responding to the needs of local Russians. And I guess it won't surprise you that I think opinion data can help in that.

In my written testimony, I suggest several programs that might be encouraged by the U.S. side that might serve as a metric to gauge the Russian government and the Kremlin's desire either for hostile or neutral relations with the United States.

I suggest we pursue these programs and track how the Russian authorities respond to them.

Finally, I want to argue that—or I want to put out the question: How stable and how long-lasting does the current political situation appear to be?

We may well be in for a decade of Putin or Putin-like policies, with Russia slipping farther from the Euro-Atlantic community, creating its own set of allies and networks, lubricated very well by gas and oil, while at the same time silencing voices of opposition internally.

Yet burdened by dissent, corruption, and poorly functioning public institutions that are inside Russia today, the future could well be less bright than the current oil-flushed economy suggests.

A day may come, and it may not be next year or the year after—maybe perhaps in a decade—when either a middle-aged Putin generation tires of the manufactured Soviet nostalgia or perhaps the children of the Putin generation, having grown up with more knowledge of the world outside of Russia, begin to demand political structures that are more consistent with the dreams that many of us had for Russia when the Soviet Union collapsed.

Perhaps the most we can hope for is that young Russians might share the nuanced vision of the United States expressed by Andrei Sakharov. He wrote, "We don't idealize America and see a lot that is bad or foolish in it. But America is a vital force, a positive factor, in our chaotic world."

From where we stand now, that would be progress.

Thank you very much.

Mr. HASTINGS. Dr. Mendelson, thank you very much. As you were speaking, I do remember being with you there in Russia. I had forgotten until we got here.

Joe, we'll [inaudible] this is a briefing, so it's a lot less formal.

And with that in mind, gentlemen, if you would allow my colleagues that just joined me—I would like, if they have any opening statements—we first were joined by my colleague and Helsinki Commission member Mike McIntyre from North Carolina.

And, Congressman McIntyre, if you care to make any opening remarks, to be followed by Congressman Pitts, I would appreciate it.

Mr. MCINTYRE. Thank you very much. I know this has had great interest not only here in the United States and before our Commission but, indeed, worldwide with the Russian elections.

I will say I've just returned from a trip to 10 countries in 8 days in Africa, Southwest Asia, and Europe, and invariably the topic about the Russian elections came up on all three of those continents.

So this is with great interest that I at least wanted to come by. Although I will not be able to stay long today, I wanted to come by to express my interest and concern and

particularly would like to hear from the speakers today with regard to not only Mr. Putin, which seems to be a focus, but also in general about the concern about Russian elections. So I welcome this opportunity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Mike.

Congressman Pitts?

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Chairman, I will pass on the opening statement. I just want to thank you for scheduling this very important briefing. I think it's a very important issue that [inaudible].

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much. We'll go from there and start with you all with questions in light of the fact that I know your schedules are super-packed.

Dr. Gvosdev? Pardon me. That "G" throws——

Dr. GVOSDEV. You can just drop it.

Mr. HASTINGS. Don't try to say Alcee either. [Laughter.]

Dr. GVOSDEV. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to come and present my thoughts on this subject, which is of great importance.

I think that there should have been no surprise at how the Duma elections were carried out.

Back in 2004, Russian political analyst Sergei Markov described the regime in Russia as a "plebiscitary democracy based on the will of the majority," where the leaders "have to violate democratic principles from time to time in the name of progress,".

I've been using in recent weeks the comparison of what we're seeing in Russia with an established European precedent that was utilized by Napoleon.

Napoleon was a big believer in the plebiscite, in allowing people to ratify decisions that had been made by the leadership and, of course, using the power of the state to encourage a positive result so that when he, for example, made himself emperor of the French, he put it to a vote of the French people, won by overwhelming majority, I believe more than 90 percent of votes cast.

But it did have the impact of making people invested in the decision. Even if we could look at the election result and say that it was not free and not fair, individuals felt that they had a stake in it. And I think that's what we have also been seeing with the Duma elections that were carried out on Sunday.

You raised in your opening statement a very interesting question, which is why did the Kremlin adopt such a high-handed approach when, according to all polling data, United Russia would have cruised to a very considerable victory, in part based upon the perception of economic recovery.

The recent essay that Karen (ph) did in Time Magazine where he compared Putin to Reagan in the sense of being able to address to voters are you better off now than you were 8 years ago, and most people answering affirmatively.

I believe that you saw this very managed approach in part because the Kremlin was concerned by how a number of regional elections have occurred in the last year in Russia, where there were upsets, where things didn't always go according to plan, where you had either United Russia not winning majorities in local elections or you had maverick figures who emerged.

And I think that this created a sense of not wanting to have any surprises on Sunday and, therefore, not simply trusting opinion polls that would show a great victory for United Russia, but wanting to make sure that this victory could be delivered.

And this is very clear, I think, when one looks at the election results from the so-called ethnic republics, the ethnic autonomous republics—Chechnya, Bashkortostan, Sakha, and others—where local leaders, who more or less run their areas on the principles of the late Mayor Daley of Chicago—of having a very controlled machine and having people vote early and vote often and have people vote even when they're not alive.

You can see that United Russia picked up 77.5 percent of the vote in the ethnic republics, and it was clear—and Chechnya, of course, is the most glaring case, where you have a voter turnout of 99 percent and 99 percent of the votes for United Russia.

And of course, one of the things that journalists were able to ascertain was that even on the streets of Grozny that a number of people said, "I didn't vote. My neighbors didn't vote. How they got this turnout isn't because we were actually casing ballots." So it's clear that you had a good deal of manipulation.

On the other hand, though, in many of the provinces of Russia and some of the regions, you did have a clear protest vote where United Russia did not necessarily get a majority.

Voronezh is an interesting case in point, a very strong showing for the Communist Party there, which shows that there is a certain—still a certain degree of regional differentiation in Russia with how regions carry out elections, the extent to which they are free and fair.

And particularly in a region like Voronezh, the Communist Party reduced United Russia's majority to under 50 percent of the votes cast.

So the national picture may look bleak, but it is important also to consider the regional dimension when looking at Russia.

This also brings up the question that I've been grappling with of the democracy paradox of Russia. What happens when you have illiberal means producing a result that most people are prepared to live with, or at least prepared to consider as being somewhat legitimate?

And the current elections, I think, again demonstrate that, where most people seem prepared to live with these results and are not too concerned about how the means were used to accomplish it.

And there are also some disturbing trends that we need to focus on which may force us to reevaluate some of our assumptions about political processes in Russia.

It was very interesting for me to look at the results from St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg is one of the wealthiest cities of Russia, one of the most well educated. It has always had a reputation as being a liberal bastion. It is Russia's, quote, unquote, window on the West.

It is a city where, according to some statistics, up to 26 percent of Petersburgers say that they get most of their information from the Internet, and the Russian Internet, in contrast, say, to Russian state television, is a pretty still-free source of information—certainly, a great deal of back and forth and debate and access, of course, to international sources of information.

Several things. First is that you had those who were calling for a boycott of the elections—that is, you could register a protest by not casting votes at all. The Petersburg turnout was lower than the national average.

The national average was said to be 63 percent. Petersburg had a 51.68 percent turnout, so it was clear that some people chose not to vote, but according at least to the data that was there that there still was a turnout.

And based on at least what some reports are saying, that they saw people out voting—although one of the things that was interesting—the St. Petersburg Times made the point that they didn't see as many young people voting, which raises an interesting question as to whether or not they chose not to vote because they're apathetic or because they simply felt that they didn't want to legitimize the process.

The results that are released from Petersburg show that United Russia barely cleared half of the vote, 50.3 percent; Just Russia, 15.1 percent; the Communists, 12.4 percent; the liberal Democrats, 7.8 percent; and then at the bottom the two liberal democratic parties, Yabloko at 5.1 percent; Union of Right Forces at 2.59 percent.

One of the other reports suggests that if you just take the center of St. Petersburg, which is the core of the city, that United Russia got under 50 percent—got 48 percent.

So it's clear that Petersburg, on the one hand, did not overwhelmingly deliver its votes to United Russia. But on the other hand, it did not at the same time give too much of a counter-example.

I think we would be in a much different setting if you have had a much lower voter turnout and if the voter votes cast had been much higher for the liberal democratic parties.

Instead of getting under 10 percent of the vote, if Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces had picked up 40 percent to 50 percent of the vote in Petersburg, it would have sent a different signal.

Certainly, you can always look at questions of ballot-stuffing and manipulation and the like, but I do think that the overall trends are probably there.

This raises a real point of contrast, because if you look at, say, events in Serbia in the 1990s, where the opposition proved it could win elections in conditions that were similar to what you have in contemporary Russia, where Milosevic controlled the media, had a strong use of administrative resources, and yet the Serbian opposition could win in Belgrade, it could win in Niche (ph), it could actually show that it could mobilize voters and take control of city councils, win elections, and it showed a certain staying power.

And this, I think, is more troubling because it sort of suggests that in the areas of Russia that are the most liberal, wealthiest, best educated, you're not seeing a super-endorsement of Putin, but you're also not seeing at the same time a strong endorsement of groups that we would see as being part of the opposition.

And I think that limits a certain degree the leverage that we may or may not have in moving the process along, if you do not have—and we are not, I think, in the case of Serbia in the '90s or Mexico pre-2000, where you had groups showing that they could compete in the process and actually win elections at the local level, and that they had strong local organizations.

And then that raises the question of whether we do have to wait for a certain degree of generational change.

Finally, what does this mean in the larger context of what—how we should react? I think that certainly one of the things that we have as—in our ability in the West and in the United States is certainly to collect as much information as we can on what is occurring and making that information available.

I'm probably a little less sanguine about our ability to make declarations about what we think Russian voters should or should not be doing based on some of these results.

The other thing we have to take into account is situating the Russian elections and the reaction to them in the context of a larger changing international order.

I found it fascinating that immediately upon criticism being released from the OSCE and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was the production of an election report from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, so that in a lot of news coverage of the Russian elections, particularly, I've been trying to monitor in other parts of the world, you now have a he said, she said phenomenon, where reporting on the elections is OSCE says it was an unfair, unfree election; Shanghai grouping says it was fair and free and democratic.

The Shanghai reporting may not have a lot of influence on how we see things, but for a portion of the world it may muddy the issue and say, "Well, is this a West versus non-West approach?"

And the extent to which the United States and the European Union, even when they're working together, are no longer automatically able to set norms and standards in a world where you have a growing power of non-Western states to influence the process—Russia is interestingly—now has an option where if it wants to shift away from the Euro-Atlantic community, it has options it did not have 10 years ago.

And on that less-than-happy note——

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Mr. Goble?

Mr. GOBLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me. It's a pleasure to see you again.

I was delighted to have met you in Tallinn when I was living there and very much hope you'll visit me in my next place, where I'll be in Baku from January, where there will also be elections this coming year.

Mr. HASTINGS. Will do.

Mr. GOBLE. I'm a culturalist, but I've been paying attention to hardcore politics and discussions of politics this last week in preparation for coming here.

And in looking at what is written, I cannot fail to recall the famous book review which everyone who has studied Russia and the Soviet Union knows. A book appeared some years ago which praised Stalin for increasing social mobility without pointing out that he had done that by killing off the top 10 percent of the population repeatedly.

And the reviewer said that this book was very much like a discussion of a shoe factory at Auschwitz, where the writer decided in advance to ignore all survivor accounts because they were inevitably biased and to look at only the inputs of labor and leather and outputs of shoes.

All the facts in this case, he said, might be correct, but it quite obviously misses the point. And I have a similar reaction to most of the sweeping conclusions that are on offer,

either very good or very bad. We tend to be on a roller coaster driven largely by a sound bite approach.

Those of us who are culturalists tend not to expect as much and therefore not to be as disappointed as often.

On the one hand, we see Mr. Putin and his backers in Russia and those in the West who can be counted on always to find something positive to say about Russia and its leaders pointing to what happened as a triumph or, if not a triumph, at least another step on the road to what we would like to see.

At the same time, there are those who are very critical and point out that these elections were neither free nor democratic nor honest.

There is some truth on both sides of this. And the reality is far more complicated and more interesting, if we will only pay attention and not simply try to reduce everything to a single sentence.

What I would like to do in the next few minutes is to go over three things—first, to call attention to some of what’s happened, both good and bad, that took place on Sunday—I’m not very comfortable calling it an election, but something took place on Sunday—to talk about what it means first for Putin, then for Russians, and finally for interested outsiders like ourselves.

And then the last point which I think is critical to a meeting of OSCE monitors is to talk about what we are doing when we engage in monitoring and how our monitoring is part of the process but can have consequences that we do not always understand, not only producing Shanghai Cooperation Committee reporting, but a variety of other things.

First of all, let’s remember what happened. President Putin decided to change this from an election to a referendum, by putting himself in charge of the United Russia Party.

And when you have a referendum, as opposed to an election, the point is not to get a majority in the parliament, which every poll said you’re supposed to get, but to get an overwhelming majority, because a referendum is about approval of past actions in the hopes that they will continue.

That is a different thing than what an election is about. It also allowed Mr. Putin and United Russia not to offer a program but simply said there is somewhere a Putin plan—I actually believe it’s written on a small pinhead somewhere—and that we will then—it will be expanded.

Second, we knew from the polls approximately how people were going to vote. And what is striking is how close the polls before the election are to what, in fact, the vote was.

The issue is not that there was a change in the mix of voters, but there was a change in the level of participation, that most of the corruption in the election process was about increasing participation.

And I’m happy to report that this morning’s Kommersant reports that they have now tracked down a series of election places in Mordvinia, in the middle Volga, where participation rates are now up as high as 109 percent.

Even Mayor Daley and even Joseph Stalin never achieved that. Mr. Putin can claim a victory of some kind.

It's already been mentioned, the massive use of administrative measures. I would suggest it's important to remember these weren't only in the non-Russian republics. They were also in the Russian republics.

And one of the reasons they were much less frequently found in Moscow and St. Petersburg which allowed the United Russia numbers to be a lot lower there is because in most of Russia's regions there are no five-star hotels for outside observers and journalists to stay in, whereas in the capitals there are people who can watch.

And let us be blunt. I think if you track the number of hotels by number of star ratings and the percentage of the participation, that will give you a better answer. That will track more closely than to whether it is a Russian or non-Russian area.

It's whether they were watched. Being watched matters.

But the polls, I think, show that—as I said, that falsification was almost only about participation rather than about the mix. United Russia would have won with Putin or without Putin.

But by Putin participating, he needed a different kind of vote and a different level of participation. That changed this.

It also showed that political parties were very weak. The freezing out of the pro-Western parties, SPS and Yabloko in particular, did have one very positive effect that's worth noting and that Mr. Putin has called attention to.

After the last election, because of the barrier—the 7 percent barrier of participation you need to get into the Duma, what you have now is instead of 30 percent of the people having voted for parties that didn't get into the Duma, only 10 percent did.

That is, in fact, a positive step. Whether one likes which parties got in or not, the fact that the people voted for parties that actually got in as opposed to those that didn't.

The ones that got in I don't think are real parties, but that's another thing—and that there was—and this is something that's going to come out only in the next few days.

There were real, honest-to-God elections at the local level in a number of regions of the country, and United Russia lost, a whole bunch of places.

In the Transbaikal, in the Russian far east, the mayors who were in United Russia lost almost always, because what the people in the—the Governors and the heads of republics were interested in was delivering a vote for Moscow, not advancing the interests of a party or promoting democracy per se.

What does this mean? For Putin, Putin's problem is how does he stay around—has not been resolved. December has some registration deadlines which should show that. There are constitutional issues.

But the huge thing that explains, I think, the vote in Russia more than anything else is most Russians are absolutely committed not to go back to the confusion of the 1990s and not to allow dual power.

And Mr. Putin has played on that and said, "Unless you have me, unless I continue, you will have dual power like 1991, '93," and nobody in Russia wants that, even if they don't like Vladimir Putin.

For Russia itself, I think this election had a terrible set of consequences. I have a whole list that I could go through. But the worst is that it tended to reinforce the Russian view of democracy.

Many of you will have seen the Levada poll that was released yesterday that showed that only one Russian in six believes that democracy is about making choices about who your leaders will be, whereas in the high 30s and the 40 percent support believe it is about freedom of speech, assembly and religion, that democracy and freedom have been confused.

And to a certain extent, we bear some responsibility on that. I'll come back to that in a minute.

For us, the problem is that we simply have got to get over the notion that Russia either has to be our friend or our enemy. It's really complicated.

We do have to recognize that we have been spending too much time proclaiming something as existing—namely, democracy, a civil society, and real political parties in that country—that, in fact, have yet to be built.

We can't seem to help from cheerleading whatever Russian Government is in. We did it for Yeltsin for a long time. We're doing it again. We did it for Gorbachev.

I mean, you know, you begin to wonder. There may be some creature in Nashi who will emerge who will suddenly be seen as the next great hope for democracy and cooperation and free markets in Russia.

We are going to be in for an unstable time. And I think we have to be ready to deal with that.

The weakness of parties, the way in which Putin did whatever he wanted, that he came in and took over and changed this election into a referendum, that he created Just Russia as an alternative party, and that the other parties that came in create a political system which—it looks an awful lot like what existed in East Germany—namely, one big party and a number of small ones.

Now, how should we evaluate all this? The first and most important thing is that we Americans have got to start realizing that we're confusing two different sets of standards when we talk about Russia, or any other country.

And that is a concern with procedural things and a concern with substantive outcomes. There are some-times when we're obsessed with procedures. Most of the reporting is about how much violation there was here, there or the other place.

But if often happens that if the procedural violations do not get in the way of the substantive outcome we like, we then proclaim it a democratic election.

And we also have had cases where if the substantive—if the procedures are just fine but the substance is wrong, we need to have doubts about it.

Our behavior in the December '93 Russian elections set the standard for this, where we celebrated the fact that the Russian Government played games. What should we be doing, very quickly?

First, we should stop saying things exist that don't. Second, we have got to address this tension between procedure and substance, which we have not done as a society.

And third, we have to understand that we can't verify democracy down to how many NGOs there are and whether elections are held procedurally correctly. It's a much bigger set of issues.

Until we do that, we're going to discover that the only place elections even approach what we like to see will be in places that have good hotels where somebody from the outside can be watching.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you so very much, Mr. Goble.

I can assure you I'm going to ask the staff to refine all of your remarks so that we can put them up on our Web site. I consider them scintillating and informative.

As you heard, the magic bell rang, and Mr. Pitts and I are going to have to leave.

But Joe, before we leave, I would allow, if you have any questions that you would put to them—then we will let the briefing proceed accordingly. And we will learn of everything that you did from my fine staff that works with me and I work with them.

Joe?

Mr. PITTS. [Off-mike.] Mr. Chairman.

I was just going to ask your opinion of the Duma. Some people view them as sort of a rubber stamp of the Kremlin. What is your thought about the implications of that conclusion? What, in your opinion, is the role of the Duma?

Mr. GOBLE. I was last, so I'll start this end. I think that there are two things. One is I think that Mr. Putin is going to be able to ram through almost anything he wants, and that means rubber stamp.

The Duma, though, up to now has been largely controlled by the Kremlin, but the Duma has played a huge role by holding hearings. I think we neglected the extent to which the Duma committee hearings have affected the way in which people make judgments in Russia.

The fact that something is said before the Duma gives it a kind of authority, and that has allowed people in the minority who may not be able to affect the passage of this or that piece of legislation nonetheless to put issues before the Russian people that otherwise would not be raised.

I mean, just again and again that's happened in the last 5 years.

Mr. PITTS. Anyone else?

Dr. MENDELSON. Well, I think what you see over time between '93, '95, '99, 2003 and 2007 is a steady shrinking of any voices that are at all critical.

And one of the things that I think is most devastating for the 2007 elections is that people like Vladimir Ryzhkov have no public platform anymore in Russia.

So people that you might want to meet with to get an alternative view of what's going on in Russia are no longer in the political—they have no public platform. And what does that mean? Where do they go? What's their future?

So when you look at this very helpful chart that you've provided. I think it's 393 votes that are solidly with Putin, and there are about 57 that are a bit wobbly and could be persuaded. But that's huge. I mean, that's—you know, the over-overwhelming majority.

Dr. GVOSDEV. Let me just point to two things that may change in the future that we should keep an eye on.

First, if one of the ways to deal with how you keep Putin around after his term expires is for him to become a Prime Minister or to shift to cabinet government, where government has to rest upon the majority in the Duma, even if it's a rubber stamp, still raises the importance of the legislature in that regard.

The second would be the extent to which—coming back to Paul's point about weakness of institutions, sooner or later the regime has to figure out how it's going to replicate itself. Where is it going to find new generations of leaders?

And are we going to see—of the current crop of people in the Duma, is this going to be used as a training ground?

In the past, it has not been a place where people have really made their political careers, but that would be something else to watch, is the extent to which people who are seen as rising figures are identified with the Duma either in the lower house or in the upper one.

Mr. PITTS. I'm going to have to leave in a few minutes, but add one other question. On the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty that Putin suspended, you know, their participation in, what does that portend for the future?

Will we see, in your opinion, increased Russian efforts to influence events in neighboring countries that seek closer cooperation with the West? You know, what does that mean for European security?

Mr. GOBLE. I think you have to recognize that the—Congressman, that the Russian decision to suspend participation in the conventional forces treaty is a reflection of a far broader and deeper trend which has been referred to of hostility to the West and a desire to manipulate neighbors.

The thing that I think we should be watching for, because it is a very—it's a fairly immediate flash point in this, is that CFE is about equipment, not about personnel. And the most important place where there is equipment is in Transnistria in Moldova.

The ability of the Russian Government to refuse to do anything to live up to its agreed obligations on Transnistria allows Moscow to put pressure not only on Moldova, which would be, I fear in this town, at least, a small thing, but enormous pressure on Ukraine and also on Romania.

And I think you're going to see within the next weeks a Russian effort to play that up by moving equipment into Transnistria rather than out, and that is dangerous because much of the terrorist activity in the world is armed by materiel that was in Transnistria that the breakaway Smirnov government not only doesn't—they don't control it, but they've sold it off, much of it off.

And I think you're going to see a Russian resupply effort, and that's very much against our national interest and our interest in Europe.

And that will set up a conflict—I believe that it will be timed by Moscow as a response to moves in the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo. I think that's what they're planning to do.

Mr. PITTS. I'd love to followup with some written questions. If you could respond on that as well—

Mr. GOBLE. Of course. Thank you.

Mr. FINERTY. Thank you, Mr. Pitts.

We'll open the floor now to some questions.

Bob Hand?

Mr. HAND. Do you have a microphone?

Mr. FINERTY. We don't have a microphone. It's a fairly small room.

Mr. HAND. OK.

Mr. FINERTY. I would ask, too, though, you to identify yourself. If you're with a particular organization you represent, that would be good, too, if you would also identify the organization. If you're not, that's all right, too.

Mr. HAND. Maybe I'll just speak from here. I'm Bob Hand. I'm a Staff Adviser at the Helsinki Commission. And I follow events in the former Yugoslavia, including Kosovo.

And I'm going to ask the question regarding the Russian position on Kosovo. And if I could ask you to put aside your own views on what U.S. policy is, because we all have ours, our own views of what the outcome of the status question should be for Kosovo, because then we'll descend into a Balkans briefing rather than one on Russia.

But I was curious as to what impact the elections and the fact that they're now over may have on the Russian position, if any.

Up until this point, it seemed as if, to me, at least, that Russia did not necessarily even want to seek an agreement on Kosovo because it had a stake in actually confronting the West on an issue, and Kosovo was a good issue.

I don't know if that's going to continue to be the case, whether there was any election posturing in that, or whether there's other things going on there that would keep Russia in that position.

I know that people in Moscow are also rather hesitant at times to let the Balkans drive them in directions they don't necessarily want to go, and so if the Russian position until this point has been one of confrontation, is there going to be a point of whether we're now going to try to seek an agreement to find a way out of it themselves?

Or do you think that this is a place where Russia still feels it can make some points regarding its position in the world vis-a-vis that of the West, and whether the elections had any influence on this position or not?

Dr. MENDELSON. I think Kosovo is important in two different ways. One is having to do with Kosovo and the beginning of the war, frankly, in '99. You'll recall that Primakov was on a plane flying across the Atlantic and turned around.

I think there are a lot of people I know in the Clinton administration who were very uncomfortable with the idea that the decision to use force in Kosovo had any negative consequences in our relationship with Russia.

But I think it is undeniable, and I think there is some evidence that, in fact, the general staff began to make decisions about a second war in Chechnya at the time the war in Kosovo began.

But I also think there's a much broader context that is important to understand. Between '91 and 2004, there was almost no Russian foreign policy. And you see a resurgence, a bit of resurgence, when Russia has paid off all its foreign debts.

And so in the '05 through now period, things keep happening that sort of surprise us, and I think we're in a period where there are new rules being written—such as the withdrawal from the CFE treaty. There's a decision, again, of course, to patrol with bombers and ships.

The patrolling issue is completely their right. If they feel that there are security issues and this is the way to deal with it, that's fine. But it is part of this larger Putin platform of restoration. And what we don't know is how far it's going to go.

Mr. GOBLE. I think I'd just make two points, violating my usual role of always having three. The first is I think it's terribly important that we get over the notion that every time the Russians say something we don't like, it's for a domestic audience.

I mean, the fact is that's the way this town functions, that any time a Russian leader says something Americans don't like, we say he's playing to his domestic audience, and

therefore when he doesn't have to play to his domestic audience, he will want to be cooperative. Why?

I mean, we don't make the alternative statement that when he says something good he's playing to a domestic audience. We assume that's an honest position.

I doubt very much that there will be a huge change. I think there's been certain mobilization that's going to make it harder to change, in fact.

The second thing is I think you've got to focus on the linkage issue. Yesterday several Russian ambassadors to the post-Soviet state say something very interesting. Not only is it the question of the unrecognized states, they said, "Well, we now need to talk some more about parts of our borders with you that haven't been agreed to."

Now, that's raising the stakes, and that was said after the elections, because that's about pressure—not only Karbakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria. But that's raising the question that in most of the FSU you've got borders which haven't been completely demarcated.

And to raise that issue after the election suggests to me that either the word hasn't come down yet, which is—people are drunk, they can't send the message, but it also means that I think you're going to see more problems here, not cooperation.

And as I say, my big thing is don't confuse this notion of what they say with playing to a domestic audience. This is something—I used to work at the State Department. It was always done.

If Russia said something bad, by definition it was for the domestic audience, which was an extraordinarily hostile attitude to the Russian people, who are less opposed to us, usually, than the Russian government.

Dr. GVOSDEV. A couple things I would point out. First of all is the Russian read on the extent to which differences on Kosovo create tensions in the trans-Atlantic relationship, because the E.U. has committed itself that a solution for Kosovo requires a U.N. Security Council resolution.

Unless some of their lawyers are able to convince the E.U.-27 that 1244 permits the emergence of an independent Kosovo without requiring a new resolution, the common E.U.-27 position is we want an independent Kosovo and we want a new U.N. resolution to authorize it.

If the E.U. wants to move ahead with the United States for a unilateral recognition and is unable to do so as the 27, it repeats 2003.

And so I think that both Sarkozy and Merkel, as much as they might want an independent Kosovo, also don't want a position where the E.U. once again proves it cannot have a unified foreign policy on an issue.

So this gives, I think—what you have is an attitude in Russia of why should we get Europe and the U.S. off the hook by caving in on a resolution. And the extent to which Sarkozy has tried and is still trying—is there a common agreement? Can we talk about partition? Can we talk about common state—all of these other things. That's something they're going to continue along.

And I don't see that there's a willingness even after the elections to simply say all right, the U.S. wants the Ahtisaari plan, the E.U.-3 want the Ahtisaari plan, so we'll just go ahead and facilitate it. I think they'll hold out.

And they can get a position where the E.U. feels it's beholden to Moscow for essentially rescuing the E.U.'s chestnuts out of the fire, having locked themselves into a position on Kosovo that either requires them to stick with an untenable status quo or have to break E.U. unity in order to have recognition. The Russians will exploit that.

The other thing I think it's important—is that as much as people talk about the precedents for Abkhazia and Ossetia, I think that there's a clear de-linking at this point, that Russia's policies toward Abkhazia, Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and others—they're going to make decisions on those based upon what's in their interest.

And particularly right now, why would you want to upset the possibility of a divided Georgia if you have parliamentary elections that put more of Saakashvili's opponents into power and by giving Saakashvili the issue that would enable him to unify the country behind him, which would be unilateral recognition of Abkhazia or Ossetia—South Ossetian independence?

But that's a warning for us, because I think we've had an attitude that if you have Kosovo doing UDI December 11th, and we recognize it, but if December 12th the Russians don't recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, we somehow—you know, we dodged a bullet on that, and it just may be that we'll come down further.

But I do think that there is a certain degree of pragmatism in Moscow that it will not automatically use the Kosovo precedent right away. It may use it later. That will be something for us to also have to worry about. It's the longer term impacts.

Mr. FINERTY. Anyone else?

Perhaps you'd like to use the microphone. Come and join us. Sure.

Ms. FINKLER. Karen Finkler, with Congressman Joe Pitts. And this question is for Dr. Mendelson.

Your comments about the youth and the kind of—the resurgence of nostalgia for Soviet times.

What do you believe the implications are for that in terms of Russian nationalism in the next decade or so, Russian foreign policy changes or not, and creative or non-creative ways that the United States could build some bridges with that generation?

Dr. MENDELSON. You know, we thought—we assumed that young people in Russia would be somehow, by definition, more pro-Western and more sympathetic. And I think that was a flawed assumption.

I think that we were so sort of puffed up—it's a kind of school of thought in social science, that, you know, economic development is going to breed this, but in fact access to iPods and lattes do not make someone a human rights activist or a defender of the rule of law.

But I also think that we didn't quite understand the promise of the '90s, that a lot of people experienced crippling inflation and the complete chaos, that we somehow—if we were calling this democracy, they were experiencing the chaos. That was particularly bad.

I will also say, though, that if you think—you know, we have in a sample 16-year-olds to 29-year-olds. In the 16-year-old to 22-year-old cohort—and I should say the survey data was supported by the Ford Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Sixteen-year-olds to 22-year-olds over the last 6 years have seen the United States engage in certain counterterrorism policies that, when you ask them, they believe they involve the United States engaging in torture and indefinite detention.

And we can clearly show a correlation of increased anti-American sentiment by those who believe those issues.

So this issue that we were talking about, the Shanghai Cooperation—that there's some kind of alternative—the sort of human rights machinery that we associated with the Euro-Atlantic community has not been looking particularly robust and not particularly appealing.

So yes, I think that this is extremely problematic for this particular generation. I think that, you don't always stick with the views that you had at 16 years old to 29 years old. People do evolve.

But I think there is a kind of popular support for nationalism. I think that there's a lot of manufacturing of the nostalgia. It's become hip. It's the new chic. And that is extremely problematic. And there's a complete glossing over of what the kinds of traumas that were experienced.

What can we do about it? We're somewhat limited, but I think that there are ways that we should be looking at—I think a lot of foreign assistance completely skipped over the idea that historical memory and legacy had any impact on political and social development. And it turns out, in fact, that it does.

And trying to create smart programs that engage young people in ways that are interesting to them is important.

One disturbing finding that we need to look more at is it may well be that the people who are most interested in learning about the past are actually more pro-Stalin, that they're much more interested in—they're associating the glories of the past. They're not interested in knowing about the gulag and millions of people who died.

And how do we get over that? That's a problem.

Dr. GVOSDEV. If I can just add one other thing, because I also think it's important—is the sense that there is a new bargain being offered to younger people, particularly to college-educated and even people who have been educated in the West.

I see this with both students from Russia, from Kazakhstan and elsewhere, who are here—they're studying in the United States—but who expect to go back and believe that—and have this kind of bargain where, you know, particularly in state companies, if you look at, you know, the next tier of middle management, a lot of people with Western background.

And there's the sense that skills and efficiency are going to be rewarded with a good job that will pay you well, that will give you a middle-class lifestyle, and then combined with that, the sense—and this is where we come to iPods and Internet and the ability to travel to take your vacations in Cyprus or Croatia or elsewhere—the sense of a good degree of personal freedom.

And I think that that's a—so when you combine the kind of national resurgence and search for identity but also with a sense that it economically is beneficial to you, I think that that helps to explain why, particularly looking at this age cohort, 16 to 29, that it's not just somebody out in the villages with a high school education, but why is it somebody in Moscow with an advanced degree who maybe did study abroad, or is a graduate of the Wharton School or Harvard Business who will also have these views.

And I think that that's an important component as well—is that there is this Singaporean-style bargain that is being offered to at least the new elite that, you know, you can benefit from this.

And that's also something—and then when this is linked—one last thing, because we were discussing before, if you look at the reaction to the elections—you know, political scientists are aghast at, you know, violations of democratic norms.

Every investment bank or consultancy that I get mailings from have all been very bullish about the election, that this is great. December 2nd was a vote for stability. Now we can move to the sovereign wealth funds and, you know, great new opportunities for investors.

So there's also a clear divide now opening up between the business community, which is much more bullish on what's happening in Russia, and perhaps the political community, that is concerned about some of these developments.

Mr. GOBLE. I'd agree with all of that. I would just add one thing, and that is that some of the interests in the past—is more ironic and difficult to understand than we've suggested up to now.

In Riga, Latvia, the most popular restaurant is one that recreates a Soviet restaurant. It's great fun. You go in there, and nothing on the menu is available, and that most of the tables are not filled. It's just those of us who remember the Soviet times.

And there's an interest in this and an ability to compartmentalize that the things that didn't affect us—you know, that we can remember a great country—and I think it is—the mistake of the West in failing to understand the trauma, not just in the 1990s—1991—overnight, going from being an unquestioned superpower to being, to be blunt, a regional power at best, to not being able to do a whole bunch of things, and now to be able to—I mean, was it yesterday or this morning?

I just read about it this morning, that we're now going to have the Russian navy patrolling out in the Med and in the Atlantic. Well, that may not seem like much, and it's pretty awful for a country that can't afford to put hot water in a majority of its hospitals.

But on the other hand, it's a feel-good thing. And the people who feel good about that look back to a time when they could feel good, you know, when even—because they weren't living it.

If you talk to people—I lived in Estonia for the last couple years, and I will tell you, if you talk to people about the Soviet past, what you would hear is that, of course, there were things that went on we didn't want and we didn't like, but there were other things that were positive.

And I think it's—even in then 16-year-old to 29-year-old group, it's important, the way in which distinctions are made. People say, “We want to be respected. We want to be taken seriously.”

I have not met anyone, although I think people like Alexander Dugin might be close, who want to set up camps that we sent trains in full and trains out empty. I just don't think that's what people mean.

And I think we have to make a distinction between a desire to go back to a great power or an ironic commentary on the present, because I think there's some of that, and a desire to recreate the entire system.

One last point, because I can't resist. There is a tendency to act as if the only option for Russia is a restoration of the status quo ante. We talk about did these elections show that we're headed back to Stalinism, back to communism.

Let me suggest to you there are lots of variants. The idea that there's only a single continuum is simply wrong. And Russians are constructing a future taking elements out of their past, just like everyone else, and their past recently has been pretty traumatic, and they're going to take elements from different periods.

A few days ago, the foreign minister of Russia announced that Alexander Nevsky was going to be the patron saint of Russian diplomacy again. Well, guess what? Alexander Nevsky pre-dated Stalin by about 650 years, and he wasn't a member of the CPSU.

But that's part of the past that's being brought, too, and that's a different thing than simply going back to Stalinism. It's not a single continuum. It's a mix of stuff.

Dr. GVOSDEV. And Alexander Nevsky went to China.

Mr. GOBLE. Right.

Mr. FINERTY. And he knew how to fix battles, too.

Any other questions?

Ron?

Mr. McNAMARA. Ron McNamara [International Policy Director] with the Helsinki Commission.

I think from Dr. Mendelson's survey I seem to recall that among the concerns of that cohort of individuals, I think about 4 percent identified human rights or traditional human rights as a concern, so it is setting up a little bit of this dynamic—you should be more concerned about human rights than you are. I wonder if you could respond to that after.

With respect to the question of political entities as opposed to parties, is United Russia sort of the monolith that it appears to be? Are there fractions within it? And what does that portend in terms of possible future development of political parties?

And with all due respect, the sort of traditional opposition parties, such as they are—some might consider them to be a bit hapless, frankly, but is it all their fault, or hasn't there been a manipulation of the system such that it only adds to their further marginalization?

Dr. MENDELSON. I don't think this is the place to go through an anatomy of all the inadequacies of SPS and Yabloko.

But as a former NDI staffer, I will say that both things are true, that there were—there have been, frankly, for the last 10 years, 12 years, enormous weaknesses inside both those organizations.

And their No. 1, I would say, weakness is their inability to actually listen and respond to their constituents, and to take survey data seriously.

If you look at some of the ads that SPS ran in 2003 on a corporate jet, you would swear the opposition must have created that ad. So you know, this is campaigning 101, but they weren't doing it.

That said, they were also—even if you were a tremendously robust party, the kinds of administrative means that they were put under over the last couple of weeks would crush even, dare I say, the most robust party.

In terms of your questions about youth, I want to suggest that this nostalgia, while it's T-shirts, cute, ha-ha, you know, restaurants, there is a much more worrisome element to this.

We have a battery of questions that look at xenophobia and nationalism, and there is really quite an appetite for some very unsavory, worrisome attitudes that could lead to a lot of violence, frankly.

So I think that, there are ways in which perhaps nostalgia could be somehow neutral, but we don't see it in this context. I'm not sure that that kind of nostalgia could be neutral.

But I think it's also—the thing that you're referring to is one of the first questions we ask that the Levada Analytic Center that conducted the survey—I wrote the survey in collaboration with Ted Gerber, who's a professor at University of Wisconsin, and we had some collaboration with folks from MEMO.RU and Grigory Shvedov in particular.

The first question that Levada usually asks, about what are you concerned about today—and despite great oil wealth, actually issues having to do with unemployment and prices continued to be of great concern.

And at the very, very end, always and forever, single digits are concerned over infringements on civil liberties.

But in other questions, we do find Russians and young Russians in particular are very interested and concerned about police abuse. They're concerned about army abuse. It's not like there's a great thirst for torture.

This is something that—they are concerned about—in one survey we did, 40 percent were afraid of arbitrarily being arrested. And I think there's a lot to be used out there by human rights groups.

Unfortunately, we have also seen a decline in awareness of the Russian NGO Memorial exactly at the same time that we saw an increase in support and awareness of Nashi.

And the dilemma for me is much more not the democratic parties. It is the human rights movement and how you make a movement that is literally dying out more robust and have a longer-term constituency.

Mr. GOBLE. Three points, quickly. First, the human rights movement was in response to a particular situation in time in the 1960s and '70s in which people could strike a pose against the regime with a fair degree of confidence that they had somebody standing behind them; namely, Western governments that were committed to being on their side.

At present, there is a view that the Western governments are just as likely, perhaps even more likely, to be on the side of the people who are arresting and harassing them.

And in the absence of that kind of support from the West, it's going to be very, very difficult.

There is a superb interview with Mr. Bukovsky in [inaudible] on the 30th of November in which he talks about the way in which he feels, you know, it could develop, when it did, and what's not there now.

And what's not there now is us. That's the first thing. I mean, we're simply—I mean, it's been talked about—you know, a lot of businesses are thrilled with December 2nd.

Well, you should know that in 1973 at the heart of detente there was an American business person who went along with Nixon to Moscow, and when he was told that the pipeline equipment he was planning to sell to the Soviets would be used by slave labor, he said, "Well, the slaves will be better off with American equipment than with Russian equipment."

I mean, that kind of attitude is widespread, and it's really dangerous.

Second point. I don't think that United Russia is united by anything except careerist interest, which means it can fall apart rather quickly.

And Mr. Putin's manipulation of it in terms of changing this election into a referendum, his creation of Just Russia—all of that means that if Putin looks like he's in a weakened position at some point, that party comes apart.

There was a wonderful commentary on Tuesday of this week that compared United Russia to the 1934 17th Party Congress, the Congress of the Victors, when everyone was behind Stalin. And of course, 3 years later, there was something called the Great Terror and purges, which I think is possible.

I regret to say that SPS and, even more, Yabloko have behaved atrociously, Yabloko in particular. I have always felt that the Yabloko leadership saw somehow that the West was going to anoint it a leader of the country, and that was a guarantee that it wasn't ever going to play a significant role.

Boros Netsov of SPS has played the politics this year much better, much tougher. He went down speaking the truth to power. I'm afraid that what we see with the Yabloko folk has been, shall we say, less impressive.

And there are people now who are celebrating the expulsion of the pro-Western parties. I mean, you see this in the DPNI Web site, in the [inaudible] Web site—lots and lots of commentaries to that effect, lots of polling data from Romir and others, welcoming this.

Now, why are people welcoming it? Well, I think because Russians now feel they aren't going to be tutored by anybody.

And one of the things that was certainly wrong with Yabloko and, to a lesser extent, is wrong with SPS, is that it's a sort of we have the answers from the West, and let us tell you how to run your lives. That doesn't sell.

There's going to be a democratic movement in Russia because the Russian people are too magnificent a nation for that not to happen at some point. But it's not going to happen because somebody comes in and says this is how the Americans do it.

It's going to happen because people are not going—are going to eventually realize—and this is not going to happen this year or next or maybe in our lifetimes, that it's not—that it's not enough to be able to buy a computer, to take a trip to Turkey. There are other things that you want out of life if you want continuity.

One thing that hasn't been said this morning—let me end with this—is that we go into elections, and there's a lot of rhetoric about apocalypse. The Russians go into elections on the sense that apocalypse is real.

So in other words, we know that a lot won't change after any election because our system is relatively stable, and we have lots of lawyers and lots of lawsuits.

The point is that in a place like the Russian Federation, there is this constant sense that things are—everything's at risk.

If, for example, the Turks should decide—as they won't, but let's just give—they're going to require visas again for Russian Turks because of the behavior of the Russian Government, well, suddenly there will be a whole bunch of Russians who go to Turkey for vacation because there's no visa requirement there who would be very angry about the Russian Government taking that away from them.

And they might express that by admiring Stalin, but it doesn't mean they want the whole list of the Stalin things. They simply want a government that has enough oomph, enough self-standing, to make sure that their personal lives aren't affected negatively.

And that is going to have to come from within. Cultures don't change as rapidly as we would like, and we don't pay attention to culture. We pay attention to political things and mechanics, as if everything could change.

The fact is Russia will change less after next year than Russians imagine. But the sense of it being an apocalypse will be very real as a rhetoric in the Russian political system.

Dr. GVOSDEV. Just briefly, United Russia faces a number of problems. It essentially has a non-existent platform. It's hard to look and say well, what's the, you know, position on taxes, position on defense, position on, you know, a whole variety of issues, other than we're going to support what the President wants.

It's going to have a real issue, now that it has such an overwhelming majority. It will have to decide how is it going to do constituent services.

That was something that in some of the anecdotal reporting coming out from the election was people were saying well, we expect a delivery, you know, we want to see now, if we're voting for these people, and the president has the power, and we have no obstructionists in the Duma—are the members of United Russia that sit in the Duma going to be taking calls and developing—in the fine American tradition of constituent service in Congress?

And that has been very weak, and that may have an impact. And that's probably one reason why United Russia was losing some of those local elections.

The final thing is that the party was cobbled together. It was basically existing leaders and existing elites that were said—come join us together. They took a—one of the things they did to SPS as well was to [inaudible] off part of SPS' talent to come into United Russia.

But at some point, how do you join United Russia? How do you—if you're a—and this is the question—mashing in other movements, is that your ticket up? And is there a sense that joining the party is something useful?

I mean, you don't have the equivalent of college Republicans, college Democrats. If you're the ambitious young Russian of 22, 23, and you want to be in politics, how do you join United Russia? How do you make your move in it?

And the party at this point doesn't have those kinds of structures established. And so then the question is: Is United Russia just another version of, you know, the Viktor Chernomyrdin's. "Our home is Russia" with a little bit more oomph, and it lasted a bit longer, but it doesn't have staying power?

Or will it—now will they decide we have the tools in place and we're going to turn this into a real party, we're going to create a platform, we're going to create recruitment, we will find a way to identify the next generation?

For me, the biggest ultimate question of everything that goes on in Russia is you look at it and you really question what are they going to do in 10 years, how are they going to recruit, because, you know, age has a way of removing people from the scene, and you have to have a way to get the next generation in.

And if United Russia doesn't do that, then we're back to square one with another party of power being created in 5 years to 10 years, and we don't have party development.

And that also comes back to, I think, one of the weaknesses of Yabloko and SPS and others, was that if the leaders of the party are the same guys who were there 15 years ago, it doesn't always send the message that, you know, we're going to continue forward and regenerate and find new leaders.

Dr. MENDELSON. Imagine if the Democratic Party were running Michael Dukakis every single time.

Mr. GOBLE. It also helps if you don't name the party after yourself. I mean, if you want to be self-limiting, Yabloko's name, of course, comes from the three people who created it.

I think it will be seen historically as part of the death throes of the human rights movement, because there was a very real belief among people like Metsov and, even more, Yavlinsky, that the West had so much power that it was going to anoint them.

And that attitude, that sense on their part, which was totally false, communicated the way they talked to Russians. Nobody likes that.

I know how we would react if we thought there was another country that was backing a political leader and going to anoint him or her here. We would have big problems. The Russians do, too.

And they have, in many ways, at least in this generation, more reason to be angry about that possibility, given that they were given what I would call weak neglect rather than tough love.

Rather than insisting they behave and then providing a lot of help, we essentially provided no help and gave them a pass in the name of saving whoever happened to be in the presidency in '93 in 2007.

And that's too bad, because the Russian people will be the first people to suffer, but tragically, they will not be the last.

Mr. FINERTY. We have time for, I think, one more question, and then I think they're going to chase us out with vacuum cleaners or something.

Does anybody have another question? I would ask one if there aren't any from the audience.

I would ask our three guests—using Paul's formulation, I guess we won't see any five-star hotels built from now until March in Ufa or Kazan, but——

Mr. GOBLE. Kazan already has several.

Mr. FINERTY. Oh, Kazan has one. Well, it didn't when I was there.

Mr. GOBLE. Ufa, yes.

Mr. FINERTY. But do you think that this outcry, if you will, or this publicity or these criticisms that we've heard, the SCO notwithstanding—will this have any effect on the Presidential elections in March?

Mr. GOBLE. Absolutely, in the sense that it will lead to an even more sophisticated way of boosting turnout.

There were a large number of discussions, even on Yedino Rossiya's own Web site, about how we were able to manipulate turnout last time, and we did it right under the nose of the Western observers, who did not understand what we were doing.

I would suspect that what you will see is some party training activities about how the people in places like the middle Volga, some of the places in the North Caucasus [inaudible].

One thing you should know if you're a regional leader is coming in with more than 100 percent of the vote is probably a mistake, because you will be caught, and we will look bad, and I am sure that those kinds of conversations are going to take place.

It will have the effect that they will become more sophisticated. I don't think it will, in that short period of time, mean they won't try it.

Dr. GVOSDEV. I think that we're falling into a pattern where the assumption is—is that the West is going to criticize. It will use the OSCE. I think the criticism still stings, to some extent. It's annoying.

But I don't know that it is really going to—it might, as Paul suggests, lead to some cosmetic changes, but I think that increasingly the sense is, as with CFE, as with everything else, we'll reinterpret rules and regulations as we see fit and, you know, if you don't like it, that's your problem, not ours.

So I don't see that this is going to have immediate consequences.

Dr. MENDELSON. The reason I think some of these events were historic that led up to Sunday is because there is a sharp break with practices of the recent past, that the Russian government was able to effectively shut down the professional monitoring arm of the OSCE.

I mean, the consequence of not having the ODIHR folks there was that they the authorities could do this kind of turnout and the people who sort of casually drop in for the election day don't get it.

I think that's a really big marker. I mean, there's not a lot that the OSCE has in terms of teeth, but the election monitoring efforts were.

I have a few different bets going with people about whether or not there is a Presidential election, what it means. I think, you know, you really need a Magic 8 Ball to figure out what's going to happen in the next couple of months.

If only somebody would come out on the Kremlin wall and wave, and we'd have, a better bet.

So, between now and March—let's reconvene in March and we'll see, what's happened.

Mr. FINERTY. Thank you for attending, and this briefing is closed.

[Whereupon the briefing ended at 11:32 a.m.]



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