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Written Testimony

Committee on Foreign Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearings on “Russia 2012: Increased Repression, Rampant Corruption, Assisting Rogue Regimes”

March 21, 2012

Supplements attached for entry into the Record: Domestic Political Determinants of Russian Foreign Policy: “Putin-3” (*Russian Outlook*, January 2008); “The Bear and the Button” (*Russian Outlook*, July 2009)

Thank you, Madam Chairman

Among the very top priorities of U.S. foreign and security policies, I doubt there are many – if any – objectives more important than a free, democratic, stable, and prosperous Russia, at peace with its own people, its neighbors and the world. Assisting the emergence of such a Russia is, or should be, among the top U.S. geostrategic goals to which shorter-term policies should be attuned and adjusted.

Always a hard job, requiring skill, patience and perseverance and a great deal of expertise, of late this task has gotten even more complicated. On the one hand, we have seen—and will continue to see in the coming months and perhaps years—a brilliant outburst of civic activity, a quest for democratic citizenship by tens of thousands of Russians who demonstrated in the country’s largest cities and by millions who think like them. This civil rights movement will eventually crystallize politically and effect another attempt at a democratic breakthrough following the Revolution of August 1991.

On the other hand, after effectively 12 years in power, the Russian President-turned Prime Minister-turned President-again has engineered an election from which he barred every prominent leader of pro-democratic opposition and limited the exposure of the majority of Russians who get their news mostly from television to what a leader of the protesters and one of Russia’s most popular writers, Boris Akunin, called a “shameless propaganda” of Vladimir Putin’s candidacy. Fresh from the spectacular and well-documented falsification of the results of the December 4 parliamentary election, a wholly-owned Kremlin’s subsidiary called Central Election Commission stood by to “draw”, as they say in Russia, whichever number that the boss orders.

Among the many troubling aspects of this so called “electoral campaign,” was anti-American propaganda and rhetoric the likes of which we may not have not seen since before 1985. Troubling but hardly surprising. Just as “all politics is local” so, in the end, much of foreign policy is domestic politics. As is its wont whenever domestic politics is dicey, the Kremlin has again resorted to all authoritarians’ tried and true tactics: alleged external danger to rally the people around the flag and to smear and marginalize pro-democratic opposition as agents of enemies from abroad. Putin’s enemy of choice has always been the U.S. Hence, Hillary Clinton as a “signaler” to anti-Putin opposition.

An upshot of this domestic political strategy was the Kremlin’s apparent decision to move beyond the rhetoric and to shift to anti-Western policies as well. Thus, beginning last year, Russia rejected all additional multilateral sanctions against Iran and criticized the U.S. and Europe for recent unilateral sanctions aimed at stifling Iranian oil exports. This past November Russia condemned an International Atomic Energy report that provided further evidence of Iran’s nuclear weapons program.

Moscow continues to sell arms to Bashar al-Assad’s murderous regime even as it butchers its own citizens as the world watches. Along with Beijing, Russia has vetoed two Western- and Arab League-backed U.N. Security Council resolutions threatening sanctions against Damascus and calling for Assad to step down. The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Susan Rice, called the February 4 veto “outrageous” and accused Moscow of “standing with a dictator.” Yet as late as March 13, a senior Russian official confirmed that Moscow had no intention of rethinking its weapons sales and military cooperation with Syria.

Finally, despite untold hours of briefings (including at the highest levels of U.S. government) to demonstrate that Moscow’s worries about the U.S. missile defense in Europe are totally unfounded, this past November, on national television, President Dmitri Medvedev re-iterated an earlier threat to station short-ranged ballistic missiles in the Kaliningrad region, Russia’s westernmost enclave bordering on Poland and Lithuania, and to withdraw from the New START strategic arms control treaty if the U.S. proceeds with the missile defense deployment.

So what next for Russian foreign policy? Of course, nothing is ever certain in this type of analysis, but domestic politics again may provide some solid clues. The regime’s post-election strategy thus far has included a few concessions to the pro-democracy protesters, such as the nominal return of gubernatorial elections and the recent registration of a liberal Republican Party of Russia. But a stronger and broader trend is clearly the one of authoritarian consolidation, including selective persecution of some key protests leaders, the re-establishing the Kremlin’s unchallenged control of television, and anti-American propaganda.

If this strategy, which reminds one of Lenin’s article titled “One step forward and two steps backward,” continues to guide the Kremlin’s domestic behavior, as seems plausible, then Russia is likely to maintain an assertive anti-U.S. posture in order to shore

up its increasingly shaky legitimacy at home by lending as much credence as possible to the narrative of protecting the Motherland against the scheming enemies of Russia on the outside and the fifth-columnists on the inside.

As a result, occasional gestures of good will toward the West, especially in the areas of deep security concerns for Russia, such as Afghanistan, are going to be few and far between within a broad and unambiguously negative policy in areas of vital importance to the U.S. Therefore, I foresee no accommodation whatsoever on Iran, Syria, or missile defense.

I wish I had a more cheerful forecast for U.S.-Russian relations during at least the balance of this year but the preponderance of evidence points to a chill, with possible frost on the ground.

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4. Have <u>you</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	5. Have any of the <u>organizations you are representing</u> received any Federal grants or contracts (including any subgrants and subcontracts) since October 1, 2008 related to the subject on which you have been invited to testify? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
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