

Testimony of Bruce Pitcairn Jackson
Before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
On Democracy in Russia
February 17, 2005

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the rapid deterioration of democracy in Russia over the past 24 months, the cause of this deterioration, and the significant dangers Russian policy now poses for the United States, its European allies and friends, and for the future prospects of democracy in the Euro-Atlantic. I would like to discuss three major questions:

- (1) What are the necessary institutional requirements for a successor state of the former Soviet Union to succeed in a transition to democracy? And how have these institutions, which would be essential for a democratizing Russia, fared in President Putin's Russia?
- (2) What policy is President Putin pursuing towards democracy in Russia and towards the prospect of positive democratic change in Russia's neighbors?
- (3) Has Russia become hostile to both the democratic values and the institutions of the West? And, if so, what should be done about it?

I

In retrospect, we now recognize that the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky on October 25, 2003 by heavily armed, special forces troops was the watershed event in the deterioration of democracy in Russia. Prior to this arrest, the soft suppression of democratic forces appeared to some as a manifestation of Moscow's historic political insecurity and an understandable effort to "manage" democracy and ameliorate the excesses of, and societal stress from, the Yeltsin era. Subsequent to October 2003, it became apparent that what President Putin had undertaken was a comprehensive crackdown on each and every perceived rival to state power and the re-imposition of the traditional Russian state, autocratic at home and imperial abroad.

However, if we focus only on the animus President Putin has towards Mr. Khodorkovsky and the resultant "show trials" of Yukos executives, we risk missing the breadth of the crackdown on democratic forces and risk failing to see the logic of authoritarian and possibly even dictatorial power behind the events in Russia over the past two years.

Let me contrast the situation in Russia with the positive developments in Georgia during the Rose Revolution in November 2003 and in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution of December 2004. Democratic leaders in CIS countries and outside analysts have paid considerable attention to the attributes of Georgian and Ukrainian

society that allowed their respective transitions to peacefully sweep away autocratic regimes despite their total control of the hard power of the security services and military forces.¹

While the encouragement of Western democracies and the prospect of membership in such important institutions as the European Union and NATO have been important factors in the thinking of reformers in CIS countries, the preconditions of democratic change in the former Soviet Union appear to be:

- (1) An extensive civic society comprised of multiple NGO's where pluralism can develop;
- (2) Independent political parties which can contest elections;
- (3) An opposition bloc in Parliament which can offer alternative policies and serve as a training ground for future governance;
- (4) The beginnings of a business community which can financially support an opposition as a counterweight to the regime's use of government resources and corrupt business allies;
- (5) An independent media with the capability to distribute printed materials and with access to at least one independent television station; and
- (6) Civilian control of the military and security services adequate to ensure that armed force will not be used to suppress civil dissent.

Regrettably, Mr. Putin and the former KGB officers who surround him, the so-called "Siloviki," conducted an analysis of the preconditions of democratic change, similar to the one I have just outlined, but reached a radically different conclusion. Rather than support and encourage these positive developments in post-conflict and post-Soviet states, President Putin evidently resolved to destroy the foundations of democracy in Russia and actively to discourage their development in countries neighboring Russia and beyond. And this is precisely what he has done.

- (1) In May 2004, Putin formalized the attack on the civil sector in his state-of-the-nation address by accusing NGO's of working for foreign interests and against the interests of Russia and its citizens. Coupled with the conviction of academics Igor Sutyagin and Valentin Danilov on fabricated charges of espionage, the NGO sector in Russia has been effectively silenced.²

¹ See Dr. Irina Krasovskaya, "The Georgian and Ukrainian Revolutions: Implications for Central Eurasia (Belarus)" presented at the Nixon Center Seminar, chaired by Dr. Zeyno Baran, January 26, 2005 (forthcoming.)

² See among others the reporting of Masha Lipman, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Moscow.

(2) Human Rights Watch reports that “opposition parties have been either decimated or eliminated altogether, partially as a result of the deeply flawed elections of December 2003.”³

(3) By 2004, United Russia, Putin’s party in the Duma, controlled two-thirds of all seats and enough votes to enact legislation of any kind and to change the constitution to suit the President. On December 12, 2004, Putin was thus able to sign into law a bill ending the election of regional governors and giving the President the right to appoint Governors, thereby eliminating the possibility of any parliamentary or regional opposition.

(4) The destruction of Yukos and the seizure of its assets marked the beginning of the destruction of the business class, but do not fully convey the scale of re-nationalization. The Kremlin has made no secret that Russia claims all oil and gas reserves in the former Soviet Union as well as ownership of the pipelines which transit the territory of the former Soviet Union. The outflow of investment from Russia over the past year and a half confirms that the business base which could support alternative political views inside Russia is shrinking rapidly. The elimination of a politically active business community was precisely what President Putin intended to bring about by the arrest and subsequent show trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

(5) Of all the areas where the Russian Government has suppressed the possibility of democracy, it has been most comprehensive and ruthless in its attack on independent media. All significant television and radio stations are now under state control. The editor-in-chief of Izvestia was fired for attempting to cover the tragic terrorist attack on the school children of Beslan, and two journalists attempting to travel to Beslan appear to have been drugged by security services. The state of journalism in Russia is so precarious that Amnesty International has just reported that security services are targeting independent journalists for harassment, disappearances and killing.⁴ It should surprise no one that the distinguished Committee to Protect Journalists lists Russia as one of the World’s Worst Places to Be a Journalist in its annual survey.⁵

(6) Among the most alarming of recent developments, however, is the return of the KGB to power in the Presidential Administration. According to Olga Kryshtanovskaya, a leading Russian sociologist, former KGB officers are regaining power at every level of government and now account for 70% of regional government leaders. Other analysts state that the number of former secret police in Putin’s government is 300% greater than the number in the Gorbachev government. In this

³ See Human Rights Watch, Russia Country Summary, January 2005.

⁴ Amnesty International Press Release, “Russian Federation: Human Rights Group Threatened By Security Forces,” January 20, 2005.

⁵ The Committee to Protect Journalists, Annual Survey of the World’s Worst Places to Be a Journalist, May 2, 2004.

situation, there is a high probability that military and security services would be used to suppress civil dissent and, indeed, are already being used to this effect.

As a consequence of the systematic suppression of the basic foundations of a democratic society, on December 20, 2004, Freedom House downgraded Russia to the category of “Not Free” which Russia now shares with Belarus, North Korea and Saudi Arabia, among other undemocratic regimes.⁶ Indeed, the majority of informed opinion on both sides of the Atlantic had reached that same conclusion much earlier and I have included their collective assessment as an annex to this testimony.⁷ What I wish to add today to the near-unanimous view that Russia has become an autocratic state is my belief that the destruction of democracy in Russia was a pre-meditated and calculated act of state power, ordered by President Putin, and executed by a class of KGB-trained officials assembled for this purpose.

If the conditions which supported democratic change and reform in Georgia and Ukraine are any guide, President Putin has orchestrated a sustained and methodical campaign to eliminate not only democratic forces in civil and political life, but also the possibility of such forces arising again in the future. I do not think that it is accurate to say that democracy is in retreat in Russia. Democracy has been assassinated in Russia.

II

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Andrei Sakharov wrote, “A country that does not respect the rights of its own people will not respect the rights of its neighbors,” and this is an admonition to hold in mind when assessing the overall direction of Putin’s policies.⁸ Rather than simply label Russia as an autocracy or as a borderline dictatorship, it is probably more accurate and useful for this Committee to regard Russia as an “anti-democratic state” locked in what its leadership imagines is a competition with the West for control of the “post-Soviet space.”⁹

President Putin’s initial argument for “managed democracy” rested on his belief that the sometimes unpredictable quality of liberal democracy could weaken the security of the Russian state unless it were subject to a substantial degree of state control. Whether or not he actually believed this, he quickly advanced to a more militant conviction that independent political parties, NGO’s and journalists, by questioning the wisdom of his policy towards Chechnya, were effectively allies of terrorism. It is a short walk from the authoritarian view that domestic freedom must be curtailed in wartime to the dictatorial conclusion that all opposition and dissent is treasonous. By 2004, President Putin had arrived at the dictatorial conclusion.

⁶ Freedom House, “Russia Downgraded to Not Free,” December 20, 2004.

⁷ An Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government of NATO and the European Union, September 23, 2004.

⁸ Quoted in Natan Sharansky, “The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror” Public Affairs, 2004, pg. 3.

⁹ Vladimir Socor, “Kremlin Redefining Policy in ‘Post-Soviet Space,’” Jamestown Foundation, February 8, 2005.

Despite the fact that Moscow has killed upwards of 100,000 Chechens in the last decade and is estimated to be “disappearing” approximately 400 Chechen civilians annually, curiously, the war on terror does not figure prominently in Russian doctrinal statements. To the contrary, the casualties in the North Caucasus seem to be regarded as a cost associated with a larger strategic objective. As Kremlin consultant Gleb Pavlovsky explained on February 3, 2005, “One should be aware that, at least until the end of President Putin’s tenure and probably until the end of the presidency of his immediate successors, Russia’s foreign policy priority will be to turn Russia into a 21st century world power.”¹⁰

To put it bluntly, the growing view in Putin’s inner circle is that in order to regain the status of a world power in the 21st century, Russia must be undemocratic at home (in order to consolidate the power of the state) and it must be anti-democratic in its “near abroad” (in order to block the entry of perceived political competitors, such as the European Union or NATO, invited into post-Soviet space by new democracies.) The war on terror is not central to this calculation and is little more than something to discuss with credulous Americans from time to time.

Again, the statements of Gleb Pavlovsky confirm understandable suspicions about Russian intentions. Shortly after the election of Victor Yushchenko as President of Ukraine, Pavlovsky urged the Kremlin to adopt a policy of “pre-emptive counter-revolution” towards any neighbor of Russia which manifested politically dangerous democratic proclivities.¹¹ Another of the so-called “polit-technologists” Sergei Markov, who also advises President Putin, has called for the formation of a Russian organization to counter the National Endowment for Democracy, whose purpose would be to prevent European and American NGO’s from reaching democratic movements anywhere in the Commonwealth of Independent States, in other words in post-Soviet space. (There is, of course, not the slightest reference to countering militant fundamentalism or Islamic terrorist cells in any of this.)

With this framework, it might be useful to review the recent interventions of Russia in the internal affairs of its neighbors:

Since the Rose Revolution in Georgia in late 2003, the Government of President Misha Saakashvili has been under constant pressure and occasional threat from Russia. In August 2004, Russia blocked the reinforcement of the OSCE peacekeeping mission to South Ossetia to facilitate its movement of military equipment and criminal traffic through the Roki tunnel into the zone of conflict. In that same month, Russian-backed South Ossetian paramilitary forces began to distribute AK-47’s widely among the South Ossetian populace, adding to the danger of inter-ethnic conflict. In return for this type of Russian “protection,” the OSCE estimates that the “government” of South Ossetia sends \$50m per year to the mafia-KGB bosses in St. Petersburg.

¹⁰ Socor, op.cit.

¹¹ Dr. Ivan Krastev, Center for Liberal Studies, Sofia, Bulgaria (Interview with author.)

In December 2004, Russia vetoed the continuation of the OSCE-led border monitoring operation which polices the mountain passes along Georgia's borders with Ingushetiya, Chechnya and Dagestan in the North Caucasus. Most observers believe the removal of international monitors is intended to allow Russia complete freedom to conduct military and paramilitary operations inside Georgia under the pretext of chasing terrorists. Russia has continued to hand out Russian passports to secessionists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and, despite its multiple international commitments to withdraw its military forces from Soviet-era bases in Georgia, continues to occupy and reinforce these bases. In a word, Putin's policy towards Georgia is indistinguishable from the 19th century policies of Czarist Russia towards the easily intimidated states of the South Caucasus.

In Moldova, since December 2003 when the Russian negotiators proposed in the infamous Kozak Memorandum to legalize the permanent stationing of Russian troops in Transnistria, Russia has worked tirelessly to exacerbate tensions between Transnistria and Chisinau and to prevent the demilitarization of Transnistria. As a result, Russia has been able to keep Moldovan leadership sufficiently weak, divided, and corrupt so as to be incapable of enacting the reforms necessary for democratization. Transnistria remains exclusively a criminal enterprise under Moscow's protection and the largest export hub of illicit arms traffic in the Black Sea region. And remember, Russia shares no border with Moldova, a fact which adds to the imperial character of Russian intervention.

In Ukraine, the massive scale of Russian interference and President Putin's personal involvement in the recent fraudulent presidential elections is well-known. Most analysts believe that the Kremlin spent in excess of \$300m and countless hours of state television time in the attempt to rig the election for Victor Yanukovich. What may be less well known to this Committee is that explosives used in the botched assassination attempt on Victor Yushchenko and the dioxin poison that almost succeeded in killing him both almost certainly came from Russia. Western diplomats and numerous Ukrainian officials in Kiev say privately that the investigation into these repeated assassination attempts is expected to lead to Russian organized crime and, ultimately, will be traced to Russian intelligence services. There is mounting evidence that the murder of political opposition figures in neighboring countries is seen by some factions of the Russian security services, such as the GRU, as being a legitimate tool of statecraft, as it was in the dark years of the Soviet Union.

With regard to Belarus, President Putin's government has been an accomplice with Alexander Lukashenko in the construction and maintenance of what has been often called "the last dictatorship in Europe." This unholy alliance has brutalized and impoverished the people of Belarus and is distinguished only by the degree of Russian cynicism which motivated it. Here again, I cannot improve on the words of Putin-advisor Gleb Pavlovsky:

We are totally satisfied with the level of our relations with Belarus. Russia will clearly distinguish between certain characteristics of a political regime in a

neighboring country and its observance of allied commitments. Belarus is a model ally.¹²

Think about this for a moment. The last dictatorship in Europe is the closest ally of the Putin Government. If this fact were not a tragedy, it would be laughable.

These are only illustrations of the growing belligerence of Russia's near abroad policy. A more comprehensive treatment would include the threatening manner the Kremlin uses in discussions with the Baltic states on commercial transit and Russian-speaking minorities; the seizure of the waterway (the Kerch Channel) connecting the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov from Ukraine; the demands on concessionary energy rights from Kazakhstan; not to mention the extermination of 100,000 Chechens. There is little doubt that President Putin believes that 19th century mercantilism and militarism are appropriate tactics for a 21st century Russian leader.

In all fairness, there are some US Government officials who believe that, although Russia's internal conditions are disappointing even deplorable, the benefits of a US-Russian partnership in the war on terror, energy export issues, and the effort to counter the proliferation of weapons outweigh these concerns. This is at least an argument for the case advanced by Russian apologists. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Russia is helping with the war on terror, the world energy supply, or on weapons proliferation beyond what the Russian government would do anyway in its own national interest. Indeed, the evidence available points to the opposite conclusion.

Not only is President Putin deliberately working to create weak and vulnerable states on Russia's borders which will serve as a breeding ground for future criminals and terrorists, he is actively trying to undermine American interests in building a democratic Iraq. In January 2005, President Putin visited President Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan and ordered him to pull the Kazak troops out of Iraq. When President Nazarbayev refused, Putin cut short his visit and returned to Moscow.

Promises to increase Russian energy production and exports remain unmet. Russia's most capable and modern energy company was re-nationalized and its resources taken over by some of its least efficient producers. Russia not only refuses to support Western anti-proliferation efforts in Iran, but it has been and continues to be a critical foreign supplier to Tehran's weapons programs.

In 2004, Russia blocked a NATO naval mission which would have provided surveillance in the Black Sea of weapons traffic and potential terrorist attack. I have already outlined the Kremlin's campaign to push OSCE peacekeepers and border monitors out of the former Soviet space, which will soon be followed by efforts to curtail UN missions in places such as Abkhazia. The overall effect of our "partnership" with Russia appears to have rendered the citizens of a dozen independent countries more vulnerable to terrorism and organized crime, while

¹² Socor, op cit.

allowing the Russian military to remain the largest source of proliferated arms in the world. This hardly seems fair value for the compromise of American principles which this partnership obviously entails.

III

Given the reversal of democratic trends in Moscow and the appearance of a threatening Russia in Eurasian politics, what are the implications for US foreign policy? It seems to me that we are forced to six conclusions:

(1) Russia will actively contest the growth of democratic governments along its Western border with Europe, throughout the Black Sea and Caucasus region, and in Central Asia. President Putin intends to block the resolution of the frozen conflicts from Transdnistria to South Ossetia to Nagorno-Karabakh and to maintain the Soviet-era military bases which serve as occupying forces and prolong these conflicts. The instability this policy will cause in the governments throughout the post-Soviet space will be a long-term threat to the interests of Europe and the United States in stabilizing and democratizing this region.

(2) Russia will obstruct the development of effective multi-lateral institutions and their operations, such as the OSCE and NATO Partnership for Peace, anywhere in what Putin perceives as Russia's historical sphere of influence, thereby isolating Russia's neighbors from the structures of international dialogue, conflict resolution, and cooperation.

(3) Russia will increasingly engage in paramilitary and criminal activities beyond its borders, both as an instrument of state policy and as a function of simple greed. Thus, the United States should expect the persistence of arms traffic to embargoed states and the irresponsible proliferation of small arms (as in South Ossetia) as well as a higher incidence of both politically and criminally motivated bombings and murders (as in the recent car bombing in Gori, Georgia and the repeated attempts on Victor Yushchenko's life.)

(4) President Putin's goal of a 21st century empire will inevitably cause him to seize, extort or otherwise secure the oil and gas reserves of the Caspian and Central Asia as a source of funds for state power. Indeed, the seizure of Yukos and the network of pipelines were the first two steps in a larger plan to control the resources of Central Asia. Setting aside the negative impact these developments will have on world energy prices, our allies in Europe will become increasingly dependent on an oil monopoly controlled by the Russian security services for its growing energy needs. Without doubt, this oil and gas will come with a political price.

(5) The policies of Russia and the conduct of President Putin are growing increasingly eccentric and seem to be motivated more by an angry romanticism, than by a rational calculation of national interest. Mr. Putin's insistence in an interview with Russia journalists at the time that there were no casualties in the slaughter in the

Nord-Ost Theater is revealing. Mr. Putin was only conscious of casualties among the Russian security services; the lives of civilians did not figure in his calculus. As everyone knows, the unpredictable and uncalculated use of power in international politics is highly dangerous. In a word, we are not dealing with a benevolent autocracy; we are now dealing with a violent and vulgar “thuggery.”

(6) And, finally, President Putin’s plan cannot possibly work. Both strategically and economically, Russia cannot support itself as a world power and cannot feed its people with an economy run by the Kremlin. Thus, if these trends are not reversed, Mr. Putin will bring about the second collapse of Moscow which may well be far more dangerous and violent than the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989. It was precisely this outcome, the return to empire and the resultant collapse, that US policy has been trying to avert since the fall of the Berlin Wall. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice advised presciently some years ago, a critical challenge for US policy will be “to manage the decline of Soviet power.” So far, we are not meeting this challenge.

It seems to me that there are four policy steps that the United States should take in response to the threat posed by an anti-democratic Russia. First, we have to end the exemption from public criticism that President Putin’s administration seems to enjoy. There has been almost no testimony on this critical issue before this Committee by senior Administration officials for the last two years. This silence is not in our interests and conveys a false impression of permissiveness to the Kremlin. If Saudi Arabia and Egypt are no longer immune from legitimate criticism of their undemocratic practices, so too must Russian practices be subject to public censure by US policymakers.

Second, as Senator John McCain has called for, the United States must end the policy of advancing access to the inner councils of democratic institutions (the G-7, NATO, and the White House) as long as Mr. Putin continues to abuse human and political rights at home and attempts to undermine democratic institutions abroad. If the conduct of Mr. Putin is free from penalty, he will undoubtedly continue to pursue policies counter to the interests of the community of democracies.

Third, the United States should work with our partners in NATO and the European Union to develop common strategies to deal with the death of democracy inside Russia and with its imperial interventions abroad. The recent enlargements of the EU and NATO added many European countries with first-hand knowledge of what it means to be an object of Russia’s predatory policies. For Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Balts and others, Russian imperialism is not an abstraction. We can and must expend the political capital to develop a common Western approach that promotes democracy inside and alongside the Russian Federation.

Finally, Natan Sharansky reminds us that “moral clarity” is the essential quality of a successful democracy in its foreign policy. As a nation, we have been far from

morally clear about the political prisoners in Russia and the human rights abuses throughout the North Caucasus, to name two of the most egregious examples.

Closely related to the lack of moral clarity is the absence of “strategic clarity.” We simply have not informed Russia where the “red lines” are in their treatment of vulnerable new democracies and what the consequences are for Russia in pushing beyond what used to be called “the rules of the game.” This Committee can play a very significant role in urging the Administration and communicating directly to Moscow, quite specifically, that the continuation of the arrests, seizures, murders and threats I have described will result in the suspension of commerce with and access to the United States.

A stern and public rebuke to Mr. Putin may cause Russia to rethink the self-destructive path on which it has embarked and serve to protect the long-term democratic prospects and future prosperity of Russia and its neighbors. It would also send a message of hope to embattled democrats inside Russia and the beleaguered democracies on its borders. Let us hope that President Bush delivers this message to Mr. Putin next week in Bratislava.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.