

# **DISPATCHES FROM MOSCOW: LUKE HARDING'S CHILLING TALE OF KGB HARASSMENT**



**FEBRUARY 22, 2012**

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

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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](http://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](http://www.csce.gov)>.

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## **PARTICIPANTS**

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# **DISPATCHES FROM MOSCOW: LUKE HARDING'S CHILLING TALE OF KGB HARASSMENT**

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**FEBRUARY 22, 2012**

## **Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC**

The briefing was held at 2 p.m. in room 210, Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC, Kyle Parker, Policy Advisor, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Mr. PARKER. [Inaudible]—2 o'clock. My name is Kyle Parker from the Helsinki Commission. And on behalf of Chairman Smith, Co-Chairman Cardin, and the entire Commission, I welcome you all to today's discussion to be a part in.

And Mr. Harding, we're particularly grateful that you traveled across the ocean to share your experience with us. We who covered distant countries can get tired of the same old expertise Washington offers. We're always excited to hear something new from someone's who been there. Mr. Harding's bio is on the table outside. But here's a quick summary of his bona fides—educated at Oxford, joined the Guardian in 1996, a veteran war correspondent, covered the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Russia's invasion of Georgia. While I'm sure he has many anecdotes to share on his wider experience, today's talk will focus on his time as a Moscow correspondent during a period of relative peace. I read his recent book "Mafia State," which is as entertaining as it is disturbing, but I'll leave the details to the author himself.

With unprecedented protests across Russia and Presidential elections less than 2 weeks away, Russia's on many minds here in Washington and around the world. The Helsinki Commission's focus is always on the human dimension and commitments agreed to by the participating States of the OSCE. Russia's not only a participating State, but the idea for a pan-European security conference that ultimately became the OSCE was theirs. I expect this briefing will touch a variety of themes, including free media, corruption, xenophobic violence, and, of course, aggressive counterintelligence tactics—and that's putting it mildly. The discussion is on the record, and we'll produce an official U.S. Government transcript.

I recognize many of you in the audience—some USG, some Russian Government, NGOs, media, and Hill staff. There's rich experience here today. And we will entertain public questions, and take pride in probing controversial issues and enjoying frank discussion. So please keep that in mind when we listen to Luke. And with that, I give you Luke Harding.

Mr. HARDING. Thank you.

Well, thank you very much. It's a delight to be here. Thank you to Kyle Parker and to the U.S. Helsinki Commission for having me here. As Kyle was saying, I was until last year the Moscow correspondent to the Guardian newspaper. And I recently worked out that I'm actually the only Guardian correspondent to have reported from Russia since the Bolshevik Revolution back in 1917.

And my predecessors were a pretty distinguished bunch. The first Guardian reporter was Arthur Ransome, who's better known in England for his stories for children. Ransome shared a flat with a member of the Politburo, Karl Radek. He played chess with Lenin. And he had a passionate affair with Leon Trotsky's secretary whom he actually married and carted off back to England.

And there was an [inaudible] then the second Guardian correspondent—back then of course it was the Manchester Guardian—was someone called Malcolm Muggeridge. He [inaudible]. He lived in Moscow in 1932 and 1933. And kind of reflecting on my rather unhappy experiences in Moscow, I thought of Muggeridge. He was the son of a socialist British MP and a writer for a well-respected British newspaper.

And he might have been expected, when he arrived in Russia, to have given a sort of sympathetic account of the brave new world being forged by the Soviets. But instead, Muggeridge was really pretty immediately appalled by what he found—tyranny, censorship, hypocrisy, brutality, poverty. And what Andre Gide, writing after the war—one of my sort of favorite group of essays, "The God That Failed," written by disillusioned ex-Communists, called the extent of the bluff.

And Muggeridge was pretty scornful about some of the Western journalists who were in Moscow at the time, who he believed were colluding in the great deceit, sending propagandas to dispatchers from Russia and downplaying or even ignoring the horrors that they knew to be taking place under Stalin.

Muggeridge's own career was brief but distinguished. He traveled to the Ukraine and North Caucasus, and he wrote articles about the genocide taking place there against Soviet peasants, about 40 million of whom died. And he smuggled his reports—he evaded censorship and he smuggled his reports back to the Guardian by a British diplomatic bag.

Now, my newspaper punished him somewhat reluctantly, not entirely believing them to be true. And there was a furious response in the West. Muggeridge was accused of being a liar. He found it impossible to get a job for a while as a journalist. And he resigned from the Guardian. And he was also unable to return to the Soviet Union.

But after his tour, Muggeridge wrote a wonderful satirical novel called, "Winter in Moscow," which is long out of print. And this is sort of—it's sort of satirical fiction about the Western journalists who ignored Stalin's famines. And it's a kind of savage attack on left-wing intellectuals who allowed themselves for various reasons to be duped. And back in London, having been kicked out last year, I have re-read this. And I was struck, essentially, by how many of the methods used by Moscow to exert pressure on foreign journalists have scarcely changed over the intervening eight decades since Muggeridge's time.

Now, in the preface to this novel, Muggeridge writes about the position of foreign journalists in Russia and the manner in which news about Russia reaches the outside. And he said—and this is in 1934—he says: There was stiff censorship, of course, but it is not generally known that foreign journalists in Moscow work under the perpetual threat of losing their visas and therefore their jobs.

And Muggeridge also notes what he calls the “thorough behavior” of the OGPU. Now, I’m sure many of the OGPU was Stalin’s secret police, the forerunner of the KGB and, of course, of today’s FSB or Federal Security Service. Now, Vladimir Putin, Russia’s Prime Minister—and I think we can probably safely say future President—is, of course, the FSB’s former boss.

So I arrived in Moscow in January 2007 to be the Guardian’s correspondent. And I was somewhat surprised to discover that the self-censorship that Muggeridge wrote about back in the 1930s still existed—not, I think, in the kind of overtly kind of tyrannical form that he experienced in the dark years of Stalinism, but I quickly kind of realized that there were certain feeds when reporting from Russia and living inside Russia that it was better to avoid or prudent to avoid. Now and in the 12 years since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the Russian press has, I think, instinctively kind of learned the rules of the game about what can and can’t be reported to the point where this system of self-censorship generally works without any kind of great effort from the Kremlin.

Now, as you all know, the Russian media landscape is mixed. It’s heterodox. But TV, which is the main source of information, especially political information for ordinary Russians, is essentially under state control with opposition politicians and critics, until very recently when these extraordinary protests started, blacklisted. Additionally, most newspapers are under the Kremlin’s thumb. I mean, there are clear exceptions to this—Novaya Kazeta, which I’m sure you all know about.

But—and back when I was a correspondent in Moscow, sitting in a rather kind of rubbish [inaudible] office next to or close to [inaudible] railway station, I would read *Commersant*, which is still a good newspaper. And I listened to Ekho Moskvyy, the Echo of Moscow, which is a progressive opposition radio station and a source of news for Russia’s frustrated liberals. But—and then of course there’s the Internet which—as the campaign of Alexey Navalny, the anti-corruption campaigner, shows—is an absolutely vibrant outlet for discussion. It’s the kind of locus of these current protests, where the conversation is taking place.

But when I arrived, I mean, the murder of Anna Politkovskaya had just happened in 2006. And I think that made really clear to all of us that there were certain taboo issues you report from Russia at your peril. And I think it’s worth mentioning three of them. The first one is corruption in high places. Now, it’s absolutely possible to talk about corruption, as President Dmitry Medvedev frequently does, as a kind of abstract problem, a kind of—a metaphysical conundrum that can be solved through reform and modernization itself. But it isn’t possible or at least it’s not advisable to talk about corruption in connection with named senior figures inside the Russian government. Now this is especially true of Prime Minister Putin, whose alleged vast wealth is an open secret within the Russian elite.

Second, it’s not advisable to write about the FSB, Russia’s all-powerful and murky domestic counterintelligence agency. Now, the rise of the FSB over the past decade has been well-documented by two friends of mine, Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, in their book, “The New Nobility,” which I recommend. But I think suffice it to say the British prosecutors are convinced that there’s a clear FSB dimension to the murder in 2006 in London of Alexander Litvinenko, using radioactive polonium.

Third, it’s extremely dangerous—probably most dangerous of all—to criticize Ramzan Kadyrov, the President of Chechnya and a close ally of Mr. Putin. It’s also clear to me as well as correspondents doing the Moscow beat that the Kremlin prefer journalists to

cover the North Caucasus from the comfort of their offices in Moscow. The FSB is deliberately placing increasing restrictions on the movements of foreign correspondents in Muslim republics like Dagestan and Ingushetia. Now these republics were in the grip of a vicious, low-level war essentially between Islamist rebels and local and Federal security forces. But I think this war in Russia has stopped being simply a regional conflict and now [inaudible] as a sort of serious existential threat to Europe and Russia, with attacks on the Moscow subway and airports in 2010 and 2011. And there are human rights abuses on both sides. But I think it's absolutely legitimate to ask whether Moscow's strategy in the North Caucasus is counterproductive.

Now I'm a kind of stubborn guy. And during my 4 years in Moscow, I think I repeatedly busted all of these taboos. In December 2007, I wrote about an article about war between various Kremlin clans in the run-up to Mr. Putin's departure from the Kremlin his departure and what turned out, of course, to be a rather cynical and costly move into the Prime Minister's office and then back into the Kremlin and his old job. And against this feuding backdrop, there were sources deep inside the Presidential administration who were alleging that Mr. Putin was in fact the richest man in Europe, if not the world, with substantial but undeclared stakes—and meaning stakes in private oil and gas companies, some of them held by a series of proxies. Now the Kremlin refused to comment on my story despite my best efforts to get some kind of response.

Additionally, I traveled several times to North Caucasus, visiting Ingushetia and Dagestan as well as Chechnya, including after the murder in the summer of 2009 of the wonderful and brave human rights activist Natalya Estemirova. Her colleagues in the human rights group Memorial blamed her killing on President Kadyrov. And then in November 2010, I was part of the Guardian team who, together with The New York Times and other major international newspapers, we examined leaked diplomatic reports sleuthed out by WikiLeaks. Now these WikiLeaks cables paint an unbelievably grim picture of Russia as a brutal and despairing kleptocracy, in which the activities of the mafia, the Russian Government, and the FSB have kind of melded and become virtually synonymous—with one investigator in Spain who spent 10 years investigating this—done in Russia under Vladimir Putin as a virtual mafia state, which gave me the title for my book.

Now it was clear to me that my kind of inadvertent knack for truth-telling was never going to be very popular with official Russia. But what I was unprepared for was the extraordinary campaign of harassment against me by the FSB, the Federal Security Service. This campaign began within just over 4 months of my arrival in Moscow in 2007.

Now I think to a certain extent my story is untypical in that I suffered more at the hands of the FSB than any other recent Western correspondent. But I think it also needs to be acknowledged on the record that these same insidious methods have been used against other people, against reporters, against American and British diplomats who've been the subject of lies and smears, including recently the new American ambassador in Moscow, spatters of diplomats, human rights activists, and especially Russian local staffers working for Western embassies in Moscow.

Now the trigger in my case was rather ridiculous. It was essentially two of my colleagues in London interviewed Boris Berezovsky. Now, for those of you who don't know, Berezovsky is the sort of former kind of Yeltsin-era puppet master, an oligarch who fell out with Mr. Putin and sought asylum in London. Now Berezovsky told my colleagues that he was plotting nothing less than the overthrow of the Putin regime. And I think



a more laid back administration or government would have dismissed this as the kind of distant rantings of a sort of frustrated exile. And my role was simply to phone Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin's sort of smooth English-speaking press spokesman, and see if he would give me a quote, which he did somewhat reluctantly. And the following day, my name appears as the third byline on the Guardian's front page story, "I am plotting Russian revolution, says Boris Berezovsky."

And really from then on, the sort of—the sort of sky fell on my head. And the FSB took—I think it would be an understatement to say—a keen interest in me. And they're scrutiny had many forms. But the most sort of outwardly intimidating act was a summons from the FSB, which fell in my office, over the criminal inquiry into the Berezovsky story and insisted I attend an interview with a lawyer at Lefortovo prison, which is the notorious former KGB jail in Moscow. And so 3 weeks after the story was published, I found myself outside Lefortovo, which is a kind of drab yellow three-story building lined with spiraling razor bar—razor wire and a rather [inaudible] courtyard.

And it's clear this is a place that journalists are not normally admitted. And so I went in with [inaudible] into the waiting room. And—but I could actually almost sort of reconstruct this kind of [inaudible]. The waiting room—if you imagine a room of this size where you're all sitting, but no table and chairs—nothing at all. So immediately you're standing. There was nowhere to kind of sit, no magazines, no [inaudible] like that. And then I had to hand over my passport and phone. And there was this sort of silvered mirror that—where the FSB guy can see me, but I couldn't see him. And I just noted the hand was rather hairy, since a hairy hand took my phone.

And then we proceeded to a kind of old, sort of red/green sort of carpeted corridor. And there were—there were old-fashioned sort of KGB cameras which kind of followed us around as we were moving along past a series of enormous wooden doors. And it just sort of struck me that there was this sort of atmosphere of a shabby menace. And it forcefully reminded me of the Berlin headquarters of the Stasi, East Germany's secret police. And I think there are interesting parallels between the two regimes—both anxious to kind of maintain their international respectability while at the same time very eager to use covert methods against their so-called enemies. And if anything [inaudible] changed since Soviet times, I couldn't identify it.

And so I arrived at room 306, I knocked on the door, and there was Major A.V. Kuzmin, who was the young FSB major who'd summoned us to see him. And he invited us inside. And on the table—and this was about that (half ?) size—were—there was some fizzy mineral water and three glasses which had the initials Cheka, OGPU, KGB and FSB. And for those of you who don't know, these are the initials of Russian secret spy organizations, beginning with the Cheka, the Communists' first secret police founded in 1917 by Felix Dzerzhinsky.

And for me it was kind of a revelation moment, and it just seemed that the FSB saw itself—despite the fact the cold war was supposed to have ended, and communism was finished two decades ago—as part of this kind of conspiratorial Chekist tradition. Mr. Kuzmin basically asked me a series of banal and pointless questions, like what was my name, where did I go to university and so on. And I think really the purpose of the whole—this whole badly scripted sort of encounter was to make me think twice before writing anything displeasing of the Russian regime.

But in addition to this kind of public [inaudible] summons, the FSB broke into my flat—something the agency would do repeatedly over a period of almost 4 years. And I

lately discovered that American and British diplomats have also suffered greatly from these house intrusions, as the FSB's clandestine domestic operations [inaudible]. John Beyrle, former U.S. Ambassador of Moscow, describes them well, reporting in 2009 how—and I quote—“harassing activity against U.S. Embassy personnel has spiked to record levels, together with slanderous personal attacks in the Russian media and with home intrusions becoming more commonplace and bold.” He is clear, unequivocal, that this activity originates with the FSB.

Beyrle gives—I mean, Beyrle is a sort of [inaudible] man. He gives several explanations for why the FSB is still [inaudible] out the KGB handbook. And he mentions prevalent paranoia at the prospect of an Orange Revolution following pro-democracy uprisings in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004. And he talks about the cold war mentality of the pragmatic hardliners who run Russia's power agencies—security agencies. And this paranoia of course has kind of gone viral since both the Arab Spring and the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya—and also of course the recent street protests in Moscow.

Now Beyrle talks about these hardliners' lack of personal contact with the West as well. But whatever the reasons, I found these house intrusions—which also took place at the Guardian's Moscow office—to be unpleasant. In each of these break-ins, nothing was stolen. I mean, no one took my TV or anything like that. I mean, nothing was burglarized. But instead it was clear the aim was to induce feelings of anxiety and psychological distress—and, quite simply, really just to kind of annoy us.

Our central heating was disconnected from a Moscow dacha in the—in the middle of a Moscow winter. Windows were opened, including the window to my son's bedroom, when we lived on the 10th floor of an apartment block and there was a sheer plunge 50 feet below. Strange alarm clocks went off in the middle of the night, which didn't belong to us and we couldn't locate. We had a burglar alarm, but I came home 1 day to discover all 14 batteries had been removed from every single point in the house. And after that we didn't bother setting it, because it clearly wasn't much deterrent.

At work, sometimes my e-mails disappeared. The office Internet modem was pulled out. The window was opened to our office. The phone on my desk was left off the hook. And if you look at—there's a little image of that there. I mean, this is sort of on the press release which some of you may have, which is a sort of classic indication of what you get. You come into work and you see someone's been sort of—it's like the three bears. Someone's been in there and left the phone off the hook. And then you can see it's—this is the date, it's [inaudible] since 4 in the morning.

And, as well as this kind of constant surveillance—bugging your telephone calls, disruption of mobile conversation—and once or twice very unpromising, pimply young men in leather jackets with brown shoes who would—who would follow me into [inaudible] and sit right next to me—there was kind of—there was sort of harassment as well. So if Olga and I were making phone calls to London, and I would say the word “Berezovsky” or “Putin” or “corruption” or “Litvinenko,” that the line would immediately be cut, and I'd hear a kind of beep, beep, beep, beep, beep. So I tried an experiment at one point, and I decided to substitute “Berezovsky” with the word “banana.” [Laughter.] And amazingly this worked. [Laughter.] I could have a phone call about “banana” to London without interruption.

And then really, the most—the most surreal part of this was, 1 day I came home from work to discover that someone had left a book on sex and relationships by the side of my

bed; there were a whole series of middle-class [inaudible] English; and then suddenly [inaudible]. And more than that, someone had actually bookmarked it to page 110. So I turned to see what page 110 was. And it was—it was advice on orgasms, how to have a better orgasm, which just set off a whole chain of thoughts in my head about, maybe I was doing something wrong. I don't know. [Laughter.]

But anyway [laughter] but actually I subsequently discovered this was an old KGB tactic which had been wheeled out by the Stasi as well in East Germany: leaving pornography by a target's bed. And after I went and got kicked out from Moscow, I actually went to Berlin and I met with a former Stasi officer, someone called Joachim Gerke, who was the professor of operational psychology at the Stasi's training academy. And he basically said that the KGB and Stasi used these same methods, which are called "zersetzend." It's a German word which means corrosion or undermining or subversion.

And he said that his [inaudible] Stasi did routine break-ins into flats of their targets in the 1970s and 1980s. Back then typically it was dissidents or members of church groups or people who wanted to flee to West Germany. But the idea essentially was to move objects around, to play God with people, and to demoralize and try to psychologically undermine them. And, he sort of said [in German accent] yes, the idea came from the Russians, but we Germans—we did it better. [Laughter.] And of course the second you think you can—because I'm sure you know who was stationed in Dresden in Communist East Germany back in the late 1980s—a young, ambitious Robert Grey, the very focused KGB officer called Vladimir Putin.

So this insidious, undeniable secret war against diplomats, against foreign correspondents, didn't and doesn't just involve the kind of more thuggish elements from the FSB. Russia's foreign ministry also plays its part. And in the wake of the 2000 war in Georgia, which Kyle mentioned, the official mood when I came back from reporting from the front line in Georgia was toward Western [inaudible] was extremely angry and vengeful. And the cycle of harassment, which kind of was like stop-start, really escalated a lot, to the point where something was happening every day.

And when I went to go and see [inaudible] from the Russian Foreign Ministry, he dropped very heavy hints that something unpleasant would happen to me if I stayed in Russia. He didn't say what, but—so—and then in 2010, I discovered that what Malcolm Muggeridge mentioned back in the 1930s about the perpetual threat to correspondents of losing their visas and therefore their jobs was still very much a reality.

In November of that year, I traveled back to London to examine the media schedules to go with the Guardian's international partners, The New York Times and others. And while I was there, sitting in the Guardian's rather pathetic secret bunker on the fourth floor in London—which was an overheated room with a—with a coffee machine that served rather mediocre coffee, and not much else—my phone rang. And it was a call from an official [inaudible] the Russian Foreign Ministry, summoning me to an urgent meeting. And he refused to say what it was about.

And then on November the 16th, back in Moscow, I turned up to my appointment, thinking I was going to be given a sort of official story but nothing else. But instead I met Oleg Vitroniv, who was a sort of official there, who began by talking about the weather and saying how unseasonably warm it was. And then I immediately knew this was quite serious. [Laughter.] So—and after an excruciating preamble lasting about 20 minutes, he finally got to the point and told me that the Russian Government wasn't renewing my visa and was in effect expelling me from Russia.

Now the—we didn't go public with this at all at this point. We talked to the British foreign office and the British Embassy in Moscow. And they protested, and they succeeded in having my expulsion postponed for 6 months so that—so that—I was there with my wife Phoebe and our two kids—so that the kids could finish their academic year. I picked up a new visa valid until May 2011. And then I went back to London and wrote a book with my colleague David Leigh.

And then in February—February the 5th—of last year, I flew back to Moscow to rejoin my family, who I hadn't seen for a month and who I missed. And I made it as far as the passport control at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport. And when—for those of you who've been there, you'll know what that's like. But I handed my passport over to the woman—young woman at passport control. She tapped in my numbers, and then she sort of went like this, and then she passed it to another guy. It was funneled to someone else, young official called Nikolai, and he disappeared into a side room. And then he re-emerged after about 6 or 7 minutes.

And he said—for those of you who speak Russian, he said [in Russian] so, to you, Russia is closed. And so I said, OK, Nikolai, [in Russian] why? [Laughter.] And he said [in Russian] I don't know. [In Russian], did you do something? And I said [in Russian] [laughter] I didn't do anything. And that was it. And—but basically he seemed completely mystified by the decision to deport me, which had clearly been made by the FSB. And I don't—I still don't know why—despite the fact that I had a valid visa, the border agency, which is a part of the FSB, decided to put me on a stop list.

But anyway, so Nikolai then escorted me with my passport to a deportation cell. And he was very kind, but he was very sort of polite. But he basically—he locked me in. And I found—I found a bunch of forlorn kind of lost souls—Tajiks, Central Asians—who were also about to be deported and waiting; they had been there quite a long time. And they looked at me as if I were some visitor from Venus. I was prosperous—a bit of a, you know, scruffy European—but being deported as well. And it was—it was rather surreal. But it was clear to me that the FSB was essentially indifferent to the kind of small international scandal that this incident caused. And I was telling everybody I knew. I was telling my friends at The New York Times; I was telling [inaudible] and so on.

And I was basically funneled back onto the plane which I'd just arrived on; it was the same plane. The door was still open. And then my phone rang, and it was Alan Rusbridger, the editor-in-chief of the Guardian. And I thought he was going to tell me that the British Foreign Secretary, William Hague, was sending in the SAS, or there was some kind of rescue imminent. And he—Alan Rusbridger—he merely said, they really don't like you, do they? And I said, no, they really don't. [Laughter.] The plane door shut [laughter] and that was it. I sort of settled down to re-watch "The Social Network," and my career effectively as a Moscow correspondent was over after 4 years.

So, I mean, just to—just to wind up my formal presentation, I mean, as a correspondent in Moscow, the favorite parlor game was—among journalists and diplomats, was to kind of ponder what the nature of the relationship was between Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin; and whether the differences between them were stylistic—both kind of—Medvedev the liberal ying, and Putin the hawkish yang; or whether actually they kind of represented something else, that Medvedev meant to genuinely move away from the old KGB lugubrious KGB way of doing business, toward a sort of more modern, savvy, Internet-based, law-based Russia.

And I think it's true to say that, for me, and indeed for everybody—journalists, diplomats—given the absolutely opaque nature of Russian politics, it was very hard to give a definitive answer to this question. There were many jokes doing the rounds, but my favorite one said that there was a Medvedev camp and a Putin camp inside the Russian government, but there were serious doubts that Medvedev was actually in the Medvedev camp.

And I think now we know what the answer to that question is, that [inaudible] relationship. And—meaning no disrespect, but I think—speaking plainly, I think it's fair to say that the very well-meaning attempts by the U.S. administration and other European governments—Western governments—to engage with Medvedev and the supposedly progressive forces that he was supposed to represent were, regrettably, a complete waste of time.

And I also think they were the product of a false premise, that there was an ideological battle going on inside the Kremlin between the [inaudible] the so-called power guys, who favored some sort of strong state control, and the so-called liberals, who wanted innovation and modernization and a more kind of Western track. But I think in reality, these vital influence groups inside Russia's kind of giant bureaucratic machine don't have any major ideological differences. I think essentially it's all about personal assets, their personal fortunes, their money abroad, and hanging onto that money at all cost, keeping their position and making sure that they can dodge any potential law enforcement prosecutions.

But I think, when talking about Russia, we have to be clear that what we're talking about is in essence a classic kleptocracy, in which, as I said, the overriding concern of the elites is to hang onto their assets and to stay rich. And I think this actually explains Putin's decision to return to the presidency for a third time, prompting huge demonstrations in Moscow—none of which, I hasten to say, I think will prevent his victory in next month's Presidential election and his return to the Kremlin and the diplomatic stage from May.

The point is that Putin's own personal prospects, once out of office, were extremely bleak. There was quite an amusing video doing the rounds where Mr. Putin's face had been superimposed on that of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the jailed oligarch, with a voiceover saying that the Prime Minister is—has been charged with various crimes, embezzlement and so on. And—but more than 2 million people logged onto—logged onto this and saw it within 24 hours. But I think the logic of this system of total corruption which he's constructed was that he has to carry on in power forever, regardless of whether the Russian people want him there or not.

And just finally, all these opposition protests—and we can discuss them now in the question-and-answer session—but I—I want to think that these protests will lead to some regime change. But I think we should all be realistic about what's going on. And I think I'm ready to be pessimistic that there'll be any kind of change of leadership or power in Russia for a while, principally because there's no correlation between street protests and Putin's putative exit from the Kremlin. There's no institution which can remove him. The election system in Russia is essentially fake. It's a kind of pretend election system with pretend democracy, pretend political parties. It's not real. There's no genuine pluralism, or not much.

And so at the moment I cannot see a scenario in which Putin would leave office. He's showing no signs of doing so voluntarily. But I'd just like to say, by way of conclusion,

that, I really adored Russia. You know, I liked Russia. I'm not a Russophobe; I'm not James Bond; I'm not a North Korean spy—all of which have been hurled at me over the past few months.

But, I think Russia is a wonderful and great country with a resilient culture, with a fantastic literature, with a marvelous, if infuriating to learn—language. And I think I want—I think many of us want—what protesters want, which is Russia to still be Russia; it doesn't have to turn into Switzerland or anywhere else—but just to have different leadership, better leadership. Thank you very much. [Applause.]

Mr. PARKER. Thank you, Luke. We now have time for a discussion. And we're out of session this week; we can be pretty informal. I hope we'll have good back-and-forth. We have a microphone there, and it would be convenient if you would come and identify yourself and affiliation, just so the transcribers have it all properly for the record.

I don't even know where to start, Luke. A lot of impressions I had reading your book, a lot of notes I made—for me it was very—it was—it was certainly entertaining. To say that, though, obviously doesn't do it justice, because after all, it's not—it's not fiction. [Laughter.] These are—these are people's lives we're reading about. As someone who's covered Russia here in Washington since, I guess, 1998, it was really fascinating to go back and visit and re-remember a lot of these events from a—from a slightly different perspective. Obviously, I read your reporting when it came across—it was in the news, it was in the [inaudible]—

Mr. HARDING. Sure.

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. Various places. But to see—to see sort of the backstory—you know, I've lately been rather fascinated by the tweets of a lot of the Moscow press corps, because of course they make very clear that this is not an [inaudible] in some of the—in so much the more interesting news—

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. Because you really get to hear, [inaudible] opinion or something that hasn't been vetted through the FT's process or a number of others—Miriam Elder, Kathy Lally, a number of names that are familiar to many of us.

The stories are really something. And I hope we can get into some of them—some of the stuff that stood out—well, I guess one point is, we titled this, your sort of chilling experience, right?

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

Mr. PARKER. And in a sense, we can laugh and a lot of it sort of strikes us as amusing. And I think to the hardened and cynical, we sort of just think it was absolutely normal. Of course, the FSB breaks into your house and does these things and everybody knows. And well, in fact, maybe that's not the case outside our insular world where we sort of follow Russia very closely. And it is actually something that's worthy of a little more discussion and thought. And I'm thinking that perhaps—it strikes me that, OK, so things are out of place or so you're getting phones off the hook, a window's open—as disturbing as it was speaking with little children. But perhaps the most insidious part of it is in getting what you had gotten in mentioning this [inaudible] which is excellent.

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

Mr. PARKER. Is—so how did it—it erodes—because these are things that nobody's going to laud you as a hero for having suffered through these things. And you're sort of denied, in a sense, the vindication—

Mr. HARDING. Yes. I would have to say, you make a very good point. I mean—  
[Cross talk.]

Mr. HARDING [continuing]. I mean, I described it in the book as kind of smart or subtle. And I think what's interesting is that the efficient East Germans who perfected this, as I sort of said, that Erich Honecker realized in about the mid-1970s that the era when you could kind of cart anyone off to the gulags or arrest people, and be a respectable of the international community was over. And therefore something else was called for, which was kind of more denial.

But the point is although—I mean, sure, it kind of sounds a bit silly. I think what you have to bear in mind is the kind of cumulative fact that if you're living in a situation where you're basically under total surveillance, even though actually it's a waste of time and the FSB hasn't been logged on to the Guardian to see what I was doing every day; they didn't need to break into my flat.

But the problem, I think—the problem's the bigger problem is actually—it's a failure by this administration, by Vladimir Putin, who very much sets the tone, to come up with anything new. There's a great review by Stephen Holmes on my book, which is in the London Review of Books. And he talks about “hapless spooks” who are—who are playing a part in a kind of cold war drama, which unknown to them was actually mothballed two decades ago.

And this is the problem. No one has come up with a new handbook. So even though it's 2012, even though everybody's using Twitter, even though the world has moved on from these kind of cold war cliches, the FSB is still stuck in this kind of protocol of house-breaking and what's called in Russian [in Russian]. And the Stasi shows that people, some people, women in particular, who are exposed to this, some of them have psychological breakdowns, some of them, collapse mentally. And it's clever. It's the kind of—it's kind of torture. And I think it kind of epitomizes the way that this regime says one thing rhetorically, but under the table it's doing a whole series of other zillion things.

Mr. PARKER. Yes. I—in a sense, it sort of struck me as somewhat of a—you could sort of use something like this as a—it's like a cookbook of how to deal with your opponents, in a—how to deal with some pesky journalist as a member of the Council of Europe, as a, an OSCE participating state. I mean, it places certain limits on what you can do.

Mr. HARDING. I do feel like I quite have it myself now. I've never seen it.

Mr. PARKER. Right.

And speaking of book reviews, it was something I had wanted to ask you about from a review here. And it starts—I'll just read it into the record here: With its love of aberration and misfortune, news always tends to be more bad than good; since it focuses on governments, coverage of a country with nasty leaders is liable to be especially grim. When I was a correspondent in Moscow, friends and I often debated whether our perpetual stories about expropriations and violence, we might be overdoing it—as our government handlers and some self-interested Western financiers claimed. No, we concluded: if anything, the truth was in some ways worse than we reported—because tracing the trails of violence and graft to the satisfaction of English libel law was often impossible.

I was wondering if you could speak to just how much are we—the public reader—missing out, because of not necessarily the self-censorship that is imposed by fear inside the country—

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. But something like British libel law, which I understand that there is some efforts at reform to, addressing libel [inaudible] of what [inaudible]—

Mr. HARDING. Yes. I mean, I think the problem is—I think it's no secret, as I said in my address, that the people at the top of the Russian state are extremely rich indeed. I mean, possibly some of the richest people in the planet. And it's very hard as a journalist to track this, because the mechanisms which have been in place since the 1990s and the fall of the Soviet Union are very complex, involving offshore bank accounts, involving third party entities, involving a whole series of proxies—they're very often extremely rich people. Government officials and [inaudible] will not own anything in their name, but they'll use proxies to conceal their wealth and assets.

So in a way, as a journalist, even if I had, 100 top accountants, 100 investigative journalists, 100 years to go to, you probably wouldn't get a definitive answer. So what you do is you just kind of follow the money. You walk around the streets of London where I live—Belgravia and so on—where much of the elite property has been—has been bought by very wealthy Russians. And these people are not Bill Gates. They're government—they're not great entrepreneurs. They're government servants whose salaries are officially very low and who are earning and who are own vast properties.

And there was another story I tried to do as well which involves Gunvor, which is basically a Swiss-based oil trading company run by a friend of Vladimir. Putin's called Ennead Timchenko who features in the Forbes list. And his company is based in Switzerland and currently exports a third of Russia's seaborne oil. Now why is a third of Russian oil going through a small village address in Switzerland?

I mean—I mean—and so these are the kinds of story I was trying to pursue. I mean, I think Russia at the moment is probably the greatest corruption story in human history. And I think other journalists are trying to do it too. But the problem is having pursued those kinds of stories, I'm now sitting in Washington rather than Moscow. [Laughter.]

Mr. PARKER. [Inaudible] the Finnish citizen in Moscow. I [inaudible]—

Mr. HARDING. That's correct. I mean, I—

Mr. PARKER. Born in Russia, right?

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

Mr. PARKER. And I believe he was also behind—had sued The Economist for a piece, must be unsuccessfully. I can remember some sort of a—

Mr. HARDING. There was a mutual settlement.

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. A settlement. And also had read some press this summer that he may have been behind some exit visa ban or something on Boris Nemtsov—

Mr. HARDING. [Inaudible] yes. But the point being that—

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. And that was quickly walked back, which I know many of us sort of saw in Washington with some shock, thinking, well, they've been telling us that Jackson-Vanik and the freedom to emigrate is already OBE and yet, sort of a bad optic as one is looking toward [inaudible] you know, making the case that this freedom to emigrate is absolute now. The decision was, I think, ultimately walked back in a day—

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

Mr. PARKER [continuing]. But it seemed to be a particularly ridiculous optic.

Mr. HARDING. Yes.



Mr. PARKER. I have a lot of stuff here, but I don't want to monopolize the conversation. Do we have questions from the audience?

Please—if you don't mind using the microphone.

Sure. [Inaudible] right up here. Yes. And I think it's on.

QUESTIONER. Hi. Sergei Veshtev, Russian Academy of Science. And I think how does this—the correlation between all these citizens' demonstrations and the future regime change in Russia, because I think there are some changes.

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

QUESTIONER. For instance, current president, Medvedev, introduced a law to return Russian gubernatorial elections [inaudible] as you may know, the council several years ago. And now we are going to have the right to elect our Governors again. So——

Mr. HARDING. Totally.

QUESTIONER. Yes, so I think there are some changes, since the demonstrations do— are able to change at least the Russian [inaudible]——

Mr. HARDING. OK. Well, I mean, I think basically the thought behind the Kremlin's secretive red walls, I think it's been a real mood of panic over the last few months with no one quite—first of all, I don't think anyone quite predicted that these mass protests—I mean, when I—when I was covering the Russian beat I was going [inaudible] demonstrations. And they were normally about sort of 300 people there, including about 100 journalists. And it was the same 200 people. It was students and it was like these really tough, hard old ladies, who've seen everything and who were demonstrating, but no one else.

And it's almost as if the sort of—Russia's sort of previously atomized middle class has kind of woken up from a long slumber all at once and sort of discovered itself. And I think—I think the reasons for this—I think there are several reasons for this. I think essentially people were just fed up with the kind of cheating and lying and sort of feudal disdain of their political leaders. They've had it for a long time, and finally they've had enough. I mean, the flagrant—the blatant fraud in the general elections on December 5th was just kind of insulting. Plus the fact that we discovered that Putin and Medvedev had always had an agreement that Putin would come back—I mean, it's just kind of insulting to a country which supposedly has an electorate. So Russians are demonstrating.

But as I said in my—in my address, I'm just—I think the things you mentioned, the gubernatorial elections, I think—I think it's not for real. I think it's a regime trying to adapt, to send out sort of, a few [inaudible] signals, but I think also to regain power. It's to hang on to power and hope these demonstrators eventually get bored and go away. I don't think there's any serious attempt to make Russia more plural, to have a [inaudible] election—which would be a—if that happened, that would be a real change—or to cede any kind of power to the local opposition. And just look at what Vladimir Putin says rather than what Dmitry Medvedev says. And when he was asked about these demonstrators on TV in December, he said that they were American students being paid by the U.S. Government essentially to demonstrate, which I think even Mr. Putin realized was kind of nonsense.

And so I don't see any kind of change of heart. I see a regime which is determined to stay in power, but one which is increasingly illegitimate, because if we see mass fraud again on the March 4th election, then what is Putin? Because he's no longer a democratically elected leader. He's something else.

Mr. PARKER. Please. [Inaudible.]

QUESTIONER. Winsome Packer with the Helsinki Commission. And again, I'd like to thank you for that. [Inaudible].

Mr. HARDING. Thank you.

QUESTIONER. And when I asked Kyle earlier whether [inaudible] at this stage, he said, "Ask provocative questions."

Mr. HARDING. [Laughter.] OK.

QUESTIONER. He [inaudible] and so I [inaudible] have to say that it's—I have a couple of observations—

Mr. HARDING. OK.

QUESTIONER [continuing]. And a question. As I was reading your book, several of the issues you raised, particularly corruption and the lack of accountability [inaudible] public officials resonated with me. I—it was educational, but it was also sort of sobering, because from where I sit, I see many of these problems in our society, except that I think that the U.S. and Western countries in general are not as scrutinized as Russia is.

Mr. HARDING. Right.

QUESTIONER. And in fact, when you speak of the insidious methods, I think the ordinary American would be shocked if they were made aware of the kind of just gross criminal, corrupt fraudulent behavior that goes on. And it's perpetrated and supported by our government and infrastructure, including within Congress. And I [inaudible]. Having been on the receiving end of the kind of insidious psychological stress that you described for the last 4 years, I would like to ask you to—since you have [inaudible] sort of free time on your hands to take a look at a committee within this Congress called the Committee of Official Standards and Conduct. And I think you'll find ample material for your next book. So I'd like to ask [inaudible]—

Mr. HARDING. Sure.

QUESTIONER [continuing]. Have you ever looked at corruption in—to the degree that Russia's scrutinized—in the United States, at our institutions and our officials and the infrastructure that hides and protects the perpetrators? Thank you.

Mr. HARDING. Sure. OK.

Well, I mean, the United States isn't my beat. And the premise of this book wasn't to say that the—Russia's evil and the Western world is perfect. On the contrary, it's meaningless—as a veteran correspondent, I've reported in various countries—New Delhi and Berlin, most recently from Moscow. And my job is simply—I don't have a dog in the fight. My job is simply to report a realistic picture of what's going on.

And I think the problem with Russia is not that Russia gets more scrutiny. I just think the gap between what the Russian regime says about itself and the actual reality is much bigger than in any other country I've worked in. I mean, the rhetoric and the [inaudible] this is a picture of kleptocracy and total corruption a long way apart.

And in a sense, I think there is a big misunderstanding in Russia about how the Western press works, with the assumptions that we're all—first of all—we're all spies. And second, we [inaudible] trying to sort of denigrate Russia and so on. And in fact, that the bad publicity that Russia sometimes gets, the fact that it has a poor international image is not due to conspiracy involving Western journalists; it's to do with the fact [inaudible].

And I also always try to bring back to my—to my Russian friends—to look at how Westerners are treated by their own press. I mean, poor Gordon Brown. Does anyone remember him? The British Prime Minister. I mean, he was basically, hounded out of office by the press. We have British newspapers calling Jacques Chirac a worm. I mean, it's just full of kind of abuse for everybody. And so my job wasn't to, make a comparative study of corruption; it was merely to give an active portrait of what's happening in Russia now. And for that, I was booted out.

Mr. PARKER. I think you can—didn't you cover the expense scandal in the British Parliament?

Mr. HARDING. No, I haven't. But I read a book about a certain MP who was—who was jailed for——

Mr. PARKER. Didn't you [inaudible] counts [inaudible]——

Mr. HARDING. Oh. Oh, yes. We had a little joke about [inaudible] we had a party and the British expenses scandal was there at the time. And yes, we——

Mr. PARKER. Well, this is the one where some MP is like—it's this invoice for [inaudible]——

Mr. HARDING. Absolutely. There's definitely corruption. There's corruption in Britain. There's corruption in the United States. In the British expenses scandal, there were MPs who were being busted for crediting a pizza or a Twix bar, this kind of thing, which is, I think, relatively trivial.

But I think the thing about Russia is—Russia is the biggest exporter of oil. It's the biggest exporter of gas. It has massive revenues coming in. I mean, it's—if you drive around in Russia, as soon as you leave the metros and Moscow, the infrastructure is—there isn't any infrastructure in spite of this huge amount of money. [Inaudible] are kind of medieval; there're places of absolute poverty and alcoholism and so on.

And so the question is where is this money going? And the answer is much of this money is being stolen.

Mr. PARKER. [Inaudible.]

QUESTIONER. My name is Sergei [inaudible]. I'm from Russian Embassy, and I have something to ask Mr. Harding. You were talking about massive corruption and saying that the leaders of the Russian Federation are embezzling a lot of money. And also you were talking about elections and massive fraud during the last elections of this year.

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

QUESTIONER. So do you have any serious evidence of the money—of the corruption and of the election rigging, except for the—Mrs. Clinton's—what Mrs. Clinton told after the elections were over?

Mr. HARDING. Well, I mean—look, Sergei, thank you very much for coming and thank you for your question.

On the elections, I mean, you can probably address the same question to the hundreds of thousands of Russians who are demonstrating in streets of Moscow, because, I think that as a kind of clever and experienced diplomat, you recognize that these elections were not perfectly fair. I mean, you only need to go on YouTube, you only need to read blogs, you only need to compare protocols—protocol tallies of what the actual count was and what the Central Election Commission said the count was to see there is widespread

fraud. I mean, I don't think anyone is seriously denying that. I mean, if that wasn't the case, then why are we seeing the biggest protest in Russia since before the Soviet Union?

And the protesters—their demands are impeccably reasonable. I mean, they're not—they don't want the abolition of capitalism. They simply want a rerun of the Duma elections, which were fraudulent. They want Vladimir Churov, the head of the Central Election Commission—he's a kind of bearded magician, almost—to be fired for his role in all this. And they just want a sense that—they want their voices to be heard. They want a—you know, they want a sort of—a proper pluralistic system where the regime changes, and the elite changes, and it's not the same people who stay in power forever. And so—

QUESTIONER. [Off mic.]

Mr. HARDING [continuing]. That's the election. As far as the corruption goes, as I said in my address, it's extremely hard to prove. I don't know how much money Vladimir Putin has. I suspect Vladimir Putin doesn't know how much money he has. But when I was a journalist, I tried very hard to write about this story. I mean, the story I did in 2007, which was based upon what a political analyst called Stanislav Belkovsky was saying—Belkovsky—alleged—he wrote a book about Putin's finances that in reality, various companies, in particular Gunvor, belonged to him, or were essentially—they were his companies.

And I tried very hard to get a response from the Russian Government to these allegations. I must have sent—before I wrote my story, which the Guardian ran on its front page, I must have sent 17 emails to Dmitry Peskov, but he wouldn't reply. And there was no reply on the story for 2 months. And sadly, I think the reason why is because everybody knows this is how the system works. I mean, if you drive around Moscow—you've been around Moscow—you can get stopped by a traffic cop, right, for some imaginary violation. And he will ask you for 500 rubles, or—and maybe it's not that; maybe it's less [inaudible]—

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. Never happened to me. [Laughter.]

Mr. HARDING. That's never happened to you? Well, maybe—I don't know if you had a blue light or whether you were lucky or if you had the right cop [laughter] but I think that kind of—that happens to everybody. And this chain of corruption stretches upward. So if the guy on the street is demanding 300 or 500, and he then has to pass probably 60 percent, 70 percent to his boss, and it goes up the chain.

Now, you asked for proof. The U.S. State Department, their own WikiLeaks cables—it's the title of my book, "Mafia State," it comes from a State Department document. I mean, Washington may be wrong. The United States may have got it wrong; the Ambassadors may be idiots. But their assessment, when I read it—when I was reading these cables—was remarkably similar to mine: that essentially, for better or for worse, Russia has become a kleptocracy.

And the Russian elite is extremely rich. There are some very, very wealthy bureaucrats. There's a fascinating cable about corruption in Moscow—which I urge you to read if you haven't read it—read it already—about Yuri Luzhkov, who was mayor of Moscow for a very long time—the money he's accumulated. I mean, there is—we never saw top secret—I don't know what people's bank account numbers are. It's extremely hard to prove. But I think—I think the overall portrait is regrettably correct.

QUESTIONER. But that—you consider that serious evidence of, I mean, election rigging and corruption?

Mr. HARDING. I do. I think both these things are real.

QUESTIONER. Yes, because—in the referring to the police officers stopping people for alleged violations, I can tell you one thing. I’ve been driving since 2000. I am hundred percent sure I’ve been never stopped for nothing. If I was stopped, I was never [inaudible].

Mr. HARDING. [Inaudible] with respect, you are a rather special person, so [laughter].

Mr. PARKER. You know, sort—so I guess sort of on this topic, there are a couple things I’d like to read into the record. They seem to me rather appropriate as we look at—again, proof of these things is difficult. Russia’s a murky environment. It’s hard to fully understand. One of the things I thought—when you were talking in your speech, you were talking about the North Caucasus and the strategy—and I’m thinking, well, who really knows what’s going on in the North Caucasus? I mean, it’s really a very difficult place to penetrate. So many of the journalists who tried are dead. And this extends beyond journalists; it extends to human rights workers and others.

You know, and again, when you look at sort of evidence and concrete proof and Russia has been described by some as sort of, a privatized state, you know, and a variety of—not even a unitary state: a variety of competing interests, all of which that, have some trappings of sovereignty—some ability to use the court system, to take advantage of Russia’s membership in organizations like Interpol, to seek mutual legal assistance.

And I thought this was an interesting quote to sort of ponder. And this is Nikolai Krylenko, Commissar of Justice of the Soviet Union in the 1930s: “A club is a primitive weapon. A rifle is a more efficient one. The most efficient is the court.” And also sort of along that vein—it’s just a paragraph from an editorial that Senator Cardin had in The Washington Post this summer: “We must be willing to see beyond the veil of sovereignty that corrupt officials often hide behind. They use courts, prosecutors, police, and international instruments such as Interpol or mutual legal assistance treaties as weapons of intimidation, hoping that outsiders are given pause by their trappings of office and lack of criminal records. We must also protect our financial system from those who would use it to launder ill-gotten gains.”

Along those lines I might add that—the particularly bizarre confluence of events a week or so ago, when Russian interior ministry officials, moving forward in the post-humorous prosecution of Sergei Magnitsky—the story is well-known—during the same week, Russia’s minister of justice, Konovalov, was in Washington discussing rule-of-law issues with us. And not the greatest week to be discussing such issues—and don’t know if he had read the news or just has, a lot of temerity, audacity, to press the issue of an extradition treaty with the United States.

Perhaps—again, perhaps they give some people some sort of things to chew on and think about. But these are some of the issues we come up—again, I’m struck, in reading your book or reading the newspaper or whatever, the—sort of the debasement of certain terms and language; the use of the word “investigation,” “investigator” [in Russian] sort of has a specific meaning, and it—and it’s—it strikes me as a clever foil to use against Western rule-of-law-based societies that are somehow given pause because, well, after all, there is an ongoing investigation.

Mr. HARDING. Yes. Can I speak to that?

Mr. PARKER. And—yes. How is one to sort of penetrate that and move beyond and understand that we know what your investigation means. We know what it means when

your President says he'll look into it. In fact, we shudder at what it means, and who might be investigating.

Mr. HARDING. Yes. But I think we have to be very clear that this—this whole value of this conversation, that it's not the case of the West—Britain, the United States—imposing our values on Russia. I mean, the—we need to be clear that these values are Russian values. These are the values enshrined in the constitution—as you said, in Russia's membership in the European Court of Human Rights—freedom of assembly and so on. I mean, these are Russian values. The people on the streets of Moscow protesting don't want, American values and whatever. They want their own values, but to be fairly imposed, and not have a system where basically—if you're a member of the elite or you've got the right person's mobile phone number—you can—you can do whatever you like, that the law [inaudible] touch you.

And one of the—one of the chapters in the book is, I cover the second prosecution of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the jailed oligarch. Now his court case was a sort of gruesome farce—again, which had been really badly written. It was clear that the verdict had been decided in advance. There's strong evidence that the judge was nobbled so that the sentence was increased at the last minute—well, this is at least according to a woman who worked for the court. And what was so depressing about this trial, and also quite funny, was that the prosecutor didn't understand it. So the guy who's reading the case very often stumbled. He didn't get the math.

I mean, the whole thing was bumbling, and just a kind of punitive tableau which I think—there's quite an interesting book coming out by Masha Gessen called “The Man Without a Face,” about Vladimir Putin, which is a sort of biography. And it's a good book, and worth reading. But I think one of his less pleasant traits is this real vindictiveness toward people who he thinks have crossed him in some way or disrespected him. And the problem is that the legal system, as Kyle says, essentially is politically susceptible. It's also criminally susceptible as well.

So another reason, I think, that there are demonstrations is because there's no kind of protection in Russia. You can build a successful business up, and someone—if they're well-connected—can take it away from you. You can be knocked over on a pedestrian crossing, and if the person driving the car is well-connected, nothing will happen to them. And I—just this legal impunity, I think people are fed up with. And I think that they just want their basic rights.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you for mentioning Khodorkovsky. I'm going to—I'm going to use something from him to move into another question and sort of another part of this story.

Mr. HARDING. So it's [inaudible].

Mr. PARKER. Oh, yes, so—we'll get to it. In 2008—this is Khodorkovsky in correspondence with Boris Akunin in Russian—I believe Russian Esquire. And he says: “You know, I really do love my country, my Moscow. It seems like one huge, apathetic and indifferent anthill, but it's got so much soul. Inside I was sure about the people. And they turned out to be even better than I had thought.” I found these words rather striking from someone who has been imprisoned in Siberia for so many years now in European Russia.

And I guess I would use that to sort of get at the issue you raise some in your talk, more in your book—which strikes me as a tale of two Russias, or at least two Russias. We have your experience; and then this incredibly moving letter from your daughter's experience, which is a different experience of Russia; and your wife's experience, which

is still yet another experience and another facet of Russia. I guess you could crudely call it a more positive experience. But it gets at, I think, one of the reasons why Russia is discussed so much—which is not necessarily because people are busybodies and most of them, have to sort of follow what's going on in other countries and not look at the real issues—but because Russia is really deeply captivating.

I think—again, not to get too smarmy, but there is something very gripping, something very human, something perhaps even more honest in what you see in Russia's system, that—that it is at once beautiful and brutal. The corruption is real; perhaps it's more honest. It's [laughter] it's one thing to get a gun in the face and say you're being robbed, as opposed to hide it somewhere in the top and cloak it in regulation and—I'm just wondering if you could sort of tease out—

Mr. HARDING. Well, may I just talk to the—for those of you who haven't read the book, my wife spent 4 years wandering around Moscow and writing basically walks—cultural pieces, literary pieces—she'd go to—Tolstoy's house, Chekhov's house; she'd go to villages where tourists had never been before. And she's just written two walking guides to Moscow, both in Russian and English, with two more to come.

And in a sense I thought we, I think a more laid-back regime would have let us stay, because she was doing all the positive stuff, almost acting as a kind of tourist person promoting the best parts of Russia. And I was just telling the political story, which was necessarily gloomy and dark. But, unfortunately it didn't work like that. So she's now writing about Russia from London. And I've—strangely enough, I've kind of got to know all of the exiles and critics of the regime, whom I didn't know previously but who are kind of living in London, and really just following Hoovering up information from Moscow, and asking themselves whether they'll be able to go back anytime soon.

Mr. PARKER. It's interesting, you know—you read your book, and my reaction is not, wow, I hope I don't have to go there again. It's, boy, I'd really like to—really like to hang out with these people and get to know these people, the Russians, even better. It's truly a captivating human story. Other questions? Not to—

QUESTIONER. Yes.

Mr. PARKER. I think we have one here.

QUESTIONER. I'm [inaudible] I'm from the North Caucasus, a journalist. Speaking of proofs and evidence, I am unveiling evidence of situation—a buried situation of journalism and secret services in Russia. For foreign journalists the cost is losing visas, jobs, being expelled from—for me the cost was much higher. I was kidnapped. I was tortured. My son was arrested. I was never able to travel for 50 miles without being detained for hours. I was working for [inaudible] Gazeta; that was all my crime.

So my question is: In the North Caucasus, journalists are still being killed. In Russia, journalists use a lot of self-censorship. The situation is not nice. We saw what happened to [inaudible] and we saw what happened to [inaudible]. So my question is: In your view, what can the Western community do to push Russia to respect the rights of journalists and freedom of speech—what the society can do? That's my question. Thank you.

Mr. HARDING. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you—thank you very much for your statement. I mean, I—just to speak to that, I don't write or suggest anywhere that I'm especially heroic or that Western journalists are heroic. And you're completely right; there are two sets of rules. Russian journalists can be killed, and foreign journalists can be harassed and bullied and ultimately expelled. There's a sort of twin track, basically—

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE. And sometimes they're killed.

Mr. HARDING. And sometimes killed. But——

QUESTIONER. Paul Klebnikov [inaudible]——

Mr. HARDING. Of course. No, I'm not marginalizing his case at all. I mean, obviously that's terrible case. But generally that's how it works. And I made very clear in my book that the heroes for me are Natalya Estemirova—the Russian journalists, not just in Moscow—especially in Russia's provinces, where there's less scrutiny—who are doing—who are brave and courageous and suffer, everything. I mean, about this, and you're a key case.

But to answer your question in terms of what can be done, I think really there's no point in—and I think diplomatic pressure is ineffective. I think the Russian leadership lives in a kind of—its own world, to a certain extent—a kind of a priori world in which essentially everything is kind of conspiracy against Russia, especially from the United States. And I think trying to treat them as sort of rational interlocutors who can be persuaded is wrong. But I think the one practical weapon that the U.S. Government has—the European governments have—are visa bans and asset freezes for individuals involved in corruption and human rights abuses.

Now there are very many rich Russians who live in—who live in London and enjoy living in London, who buy up British football teams, newspapers, everything else. Now of course, I'm in favor of a free market and so on. But I don't think Britain should be giving visas to people who are connected with human rights cases, certainly [inaudible] or other ones as well.

But I think that's the one weapon that Western governments have, because the whole [inaudible] is up in Europe for visa liberalization. I've never met anyone, any ordinary Russian, who cares about visa liberalization of the European Union. But the bureaucratic class, hell, they care about it, because their wives go shopping in Paris; they have flats in Knightsbridge; their kids attend British schools and so on. And so this really is a weapon. But whether there's any kind of political will to do that from London, from Washington, I think we'll have to see. Possibly, but that conversation is still going on.

Mr. PARKER. Questions, please. Cathy.

QUESTIONER. Cathy Cosman on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. I wanted to try out on you a couple of comments that Sergei Markedonov made at a recent session today on the Caucasus. And that was, he felt that Russian policy on the North Caucasus could be defined as outsourcing sovereignty. He admitted that certainly that's true—probably most true of Chechnya. And you mentioned Kadyrov being the most difficult—one of the taboo topics, and I'd like to hear more about that, but also if you could view that as applying to other parts of the North Caucasus as well.

And another comment he made, which I felt was very interesting apropos the elections, was that there are really three Russias from a political perspective. One is the budget, the parts of Russia that depend on the state budget—which includes, [inaudible] and not just sections of Russia, but also sections of the population like pensioners. Another of course is rural Russia. And then of course there is urban Russia, which, as usual, the Western press is obsessed by. I—they are the most privileged. It's the best educated with the best Western connections and international connections. So while that's understandable, I think that also distorts the perception of what actually Russia is.



And finally he said—and I’m just quoting him, because I think he’s quite knowledgeable—that he felt that even the three Russias, as he defined them—probably if you added it all up, the real level of support for Putin would be 40 percent. But—so any reaction to that, I would appreciate. Thanks.

Mr. HARDING. OK. Just to keep it relatively brief, on the Caucasus—I think much of his policy has failed in the Caucasus, and that the war there is spilling over into European Russia. There are all sorts of reasons—poverty, corruption, economic backwardness and so on. But I think there’s been no creative thinking by the Kremlin for some time on this. And the default position is always to use force. There’s no really meaningful attempt to explore nonforce solutions. And yes [inaudible] has been franchised out to [inaudible]. I mean [inaudible] is the powerful regional leader Russia [inaudible]. But in a way, Chechnya now enjoys more de facto kind of independence than it did in the 1990s when there was a constitution and separatists who were fighting for their own separate state and were brutally suppressed. And Chechnya is just a kind of bizarre eastern kind of fiefdom. You drive through Grozny, and you see huge portraits of Putin, of—his father everywhere. It’s like being in [inaudible] photo album [inaudible] situation there. I can only see it getting worse.

On the middle class: Sure, it’s easy to talk to people like you. And I think probably you’re right. But there’s—when I was there, I did less reporting than I would have liked to have done from rural Russia. I did do some pieces. But it’s a totally different world.

And it’s true that in some provincial areas that, Vladimir Putin has support there. I mean, 40 percent I think is a bit high. But the problem is, it’s impossible to gauge it, because there’s no mechanism. There’s no mechanism because there are no democratic elections—not real elections. Opposition parties that offend the Kremlin are not—and they’re not—and they’re not—they’re sort of nonsystemic. They’re not allowed to stand. So—and plus they’re all this kind of TV. If you watch Russian—if you speak Russian, you watch Russian TV, it’s like sort of TV for zombies. You know, it’s interesting. I mean, young little Russians just like watch it because it’s just a fairy tale. There’s no real sense to what’s going on, and it’s basically a day blog of Putin and Medvedev [inaudible].

So we can’t—I mean, Putin definitely has some support, but he’s less popular than he used to be for sure. And I think this social contract which existed during his last two Presidential terms, which was in essence—what he said was: You give up your rights, your democratic rights, but in return you get more prosperity; your standard of living will go up—I think that social contract is bust. I think it’s collapsed. I think—these are tough economic times and I think people are tired. They want a new hero. They want—it’s like having watched seven “Harry Potters” and quite enjoying it. You realize there’s no 8th, 9th or 10th “Harry Potter.” It’s just time for a new—franchise.

Mr. PARKER. Thank you. Do we have other questions?

QUESTIONER. [Off mic.]

Mr. PARKER. [Off mic.] If you wouldn’t mind again—I hate to make you do it, but we won’t get it on the record if it’s not on the microphone.

QUESTIONER. [Inaudible.] Sorry—

QUESTIONER. No? Well, there’s a French journalist.

Mr. HARDING. Yes, I’ve read the story. Yes, yes.

QUESTIONER. And she was denied visa and expelled. Then head of the Russian Federal Immigration Service fired the local boss of some regional division of [inaudible]

immigration service. And Russian Ambassador [inaudible] and asked her to go back to Russia. So sometimes strange things happen in Russia. [Laughter.]

Mr. HARDING. Yes, I [inaudible] agree with that thesis, that sometimes strange things do happen. And it goes to the model of whether this—actually, it speaks to the model of whether this a ruthlessly organized, efficient, Prussian, vertical state [inaudible] or whether actually it's just a [inaudible].

QUESTIONER. Yes.

Mr. HARDING. It's a sort of chaotic thing where, people do the wrong thing or the—a bureaucrat is away, he's on holiday, or his boss stamps the wrong form and so on. And I think that the state is very powerful. But I also think that a lot of these kind of, [inaudible] are deliberate. I mean, in my case I was expelled [inaudible] guys. Then [inaudible] was about to visit London, and there was a debate in the British House of Commons with MPs, members of Parliament standing up to say, well, you know, if British journalists are not welcome in Moscow [inaudible] not welcome in London. And then the Russian ambassador in London [inaudible] said that, he can have a visa again—which was great. So after a week I was allowed to fly back. I wouldn't be deported. I was on the same plane. I re-watched "The Social Network" for the third time. And—but when I got to the airport, I was met by [inaudible] and he gave it to me, and it was only valid until May. So I said, well, that's like a few weeks away. What happens in May? Well, it turned out anyway I had to leave again.

So this was merely—I was going to be really expelled for the third time. So it was a kind of—it's a game, right, and it's a game. And it sets the tone. I mean, you don't need to bully every foreign journalist. You do need to periodically kick one out or make them have visa problems. And this makes everyone think, do I really want to write that story? Will it be passing on consequences to me and my family and my loved ones, et cetera? You know, will my kids have to find a new school in [inaudible] which is what happens to us. And so it just enforces the system of self-censorship. So maybe this was a mess-up. But I think in my case that the plan was essentially all along to just wreck our family life. I mean, we were told in November we had to leave. I said, can we stay during Christmas? The answer was no. We had our own [inaudible] wrapped up. We had [inaudible] we were about to get on the plane and go to the airport. Our kids had left school to say goodbye to their friends, and then a phone call came [inaudible] I will give you a visa till May.

And I include my daughter's letter in this book; she was 13. And she writes about how her life had been turned upside down. And it's a very moving piece because we—there's a humorous joke to our Moscow. We hung a clock with Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin's faces on the—it was a kind of greeting for our FSB intruders. The first thing they saw was their boss. So I was hoping they might kind of take a bow or something to the czars as they came in to muck my flat up. And so she starts about how this was a kind of a joke, a kind of parody. And then she says, well, now when I see the clock, I realize it's the source of all my problems, and now I realize that this is when my life has been turned upside down. And now we don't really joke about the clock. And it's all thanks to [inaudible] and Vlad.

And I have to say, every parent, loves their kids, but I can't read this without kind of crying, because it's one thing—as it's one thing as a journalist taking this and so on, but somehow when your family's involved and there are consequences for them, you feel unbelievably guilty about it, because they didn't sign up for that. And that's why the

FSB's tactics are so clever, because they know where you're vulnerable, and where you're vulnerable, so is your family—and something will not necessarily happen to them, but there is the fear that something might happen to them.

QUESTIONER. A couple of points I wanted to ask you. One: What was the reaction of your [inaudible]? Did you—did you find support? I know there's [inaudible] discussions.

Mr. HARDING. Yes, yes.

QUESTIONER. And I'm just wondering what the general sense there was, and as well, also, if you could give us a little bit of insight. I mean, you've covered some pretty interesting and hot stories.

Mr. HARDING. Yes.

QUESTIONER. You were around the battle at Mazar-e Sharif where Johnny Micheal Spann, CIA operative, first American casualty in the Afghan War; John Walker Lindh, the American Taliban, was picked up.

Mr. HARDING. That's right.

QUESTIONER. You covered Iraq. You were in South Ossetia, inside of Georgia. Psychologically speaking—Delhi as well—left that out. I would assume that was relatively calm. But, India has a rather sophisticated intelligence service. Were there any similarities? Was the psychological toll different, the same, more intense? I mean, I have friends that did [inaudible] who suffer PTSD after their tour at the American Embassy Baghdad. How did Moscow compare to that?

Mr. HARDING. Yes, well, I mean, the strange thing was—and again, I don't mean to be in any way flippant—in some ways, covering war is easier than what you get in Moscow. Because in a war situation—I was very distressed by the death of Marie Colvin in Syria, who was a colleague in the Sunday Times who was killed in Homs—but in a war situation, in a sense you—it's kind of chaos for everybody. And you make your own risk assessment. You hope you've made the right risk assessment. You try and, you know, interview people, stay alive, do the story and so on. But the conditions are really difficult for everybody.

What was so insidious about Moscow was, it's personal. It really is personal. And essentially, if you don't write critical articles about the Russian regime, their agendas, then nothing will happen to you—probably not. And if you do, then there may or may not be consequences. And I think what Vladimir Putin has done really very cleverly—I don't underestimate him at all—is that he's created a system where private space is private space, for most people. If you put somebody to one side and said, so, if you're a Russian citizen, this is not the Soviet Union; this is not the Soviet Union part two. You can earn a living, you can fall in love, you can have affairs, you can get drunk—you can do all that stuff. And that's OK.

But the problem is, as soon as you start challenging in any way the Kremlin's monopoly on power and information as soon as you're in the public space, then various things can happen to you—very often legalistic things.

You might have a visit from the tax police. Your company might be raided by the—the fire people—and so on. As journalists you might have accreditation problems and so on. And so that's the wall. Private space is fine and public space isn't. And of course, everyone is trying to guess where precisely the line is.

Mr. PARKER. What about the reaction from other colleagues [inaudible]?

Mr. HARDING. Oh, I'm so sorry [inaudible] yes. Well actually, the thing is, the—in a way, these house break-ins—the FSB sort of burglary [inaudible] it's the worst-kept diplomatic secret in Moscow. And after this happened to me for the first time, I just didn't know what the rules of the game were. And so the British Embassy I phoned them up. And they said, well, come in; we'll give you a little talk. And so we were taken upstairs to a sort of room which was secure. And basically the guy who briefed me there said, we have a file of this—big cases—that basically it's happened to a lot of people. And he explained what the standard methodology was.

But several of my journalist colleagues, Western journalist colleagues, have suffered from this—but normally only on kind of one occasion, and that's it. With me, I don't know how many times they broke into my flat, but—and office, but at least I would say 10—8 to 10, 12 occasions I knew of, and then others where—when it wasn't known by me. So they really had it in for me. But again, the people I felt most sorry for were my Russian colleagues.

There was one woman who worked for the Guardian. And the FSB broke into her flat on one occasion; they did—they did basically a couple of things. She came home from work—she lived alone, single, 41 years old—came out to her flat and discovered that her beret, which had been hanging on the peg next to the door, was in the middle of her living room. And that was it. And she—no one believed her; she had a nervous breakdown; she resigned; she severed all contact; I never saw her again. And this is the problem. The problem is, for Russians that are in the system who can't leave, with their wife and Kids, move on, I think these tactics can be devastating.

Mr. PARKER. Others? We can continue if there's interest in questions, or we can wrap up. Have an opportunity here to put on-the-record questions to a leading journalist, one of the most important English-language newspapers in the world? Anyone?

Mr. HARDING. Or we can stop. [Laughter.]

Mr. PARKER. Or we can stop [inaudible] I have a—I'm sure there are—there are other questions to ask.

Oh, one other thing should be mentioned, by the way. And there is some material outside on some other cases and this phenomenon in other contexts—a particular case, an American diplomat a few years back; as well as a relatively recent story within the past year in The Washington Times on sort of dirty tricks, if you will, for lack of a better term. I'm just looking to see if there's something else I—

Mr. HARDING. I think we can wrap up.

Mr. PARKER. Yes. Yes. I suppose and—without any further questions. And I think we've had a free-ranging, interesting discussion, provocative at times. I hope you've all enjoyed it. It will be in transcription form probably in about, I don't know, 48 hours on our website, csce.gov. You can stop in there to see any upcoming activity we have going. Thank the audience again. I'd like to thank you, Luke, for traveling. Thank our wonderful Rebecca Armitage, a stellar intern from Australia who has helped us put this briefing together. And with that, we stand adjourned.

Mr. HARDING. Thank you very much. Thank you for coming.









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