

Heritage Foundation  
The Risks of the Reset: Why Washington Must Watch Its Step With Moscow  
October 25, 2011

Garry Kasparov: Why Vladimir Putin Is Immune to the American Reset

Thank you for inviting me to attend this important event here at the Heritage Foundation today. My thanks to Speaker Boehner and all the other participants for their interest and their comments.

For a little introduction of myself, there's one fact from my biography that is always omitted. Many here might not be aware that I myself am from the Deep South, right next to Georgia. [SLIDE: MAP OF USSR]



Of course, I'm referring to the Deep South of the Soviet Union! That's my hometown of Baku, Azerbaijan, where I was born in 1963, next to what is now the Republic of Georgia.

Of course much has changed since then. There are no more Communists in the Republic of Georgia – much like there are no more Democrats in the state of Georgia. And Georgia is as good a place as any to begin my talk on the Putin regime's immunity to America's attempts at a reset. Georgia is currently under great pressure from the US and others to allow Russia to join the World Trade Organization, despite two large pieces of Georgian sovereign territory being occupied by Russian forces. [SLIDE: MAP OF GEORGIA AND OCCUPIED TERRITORIES]

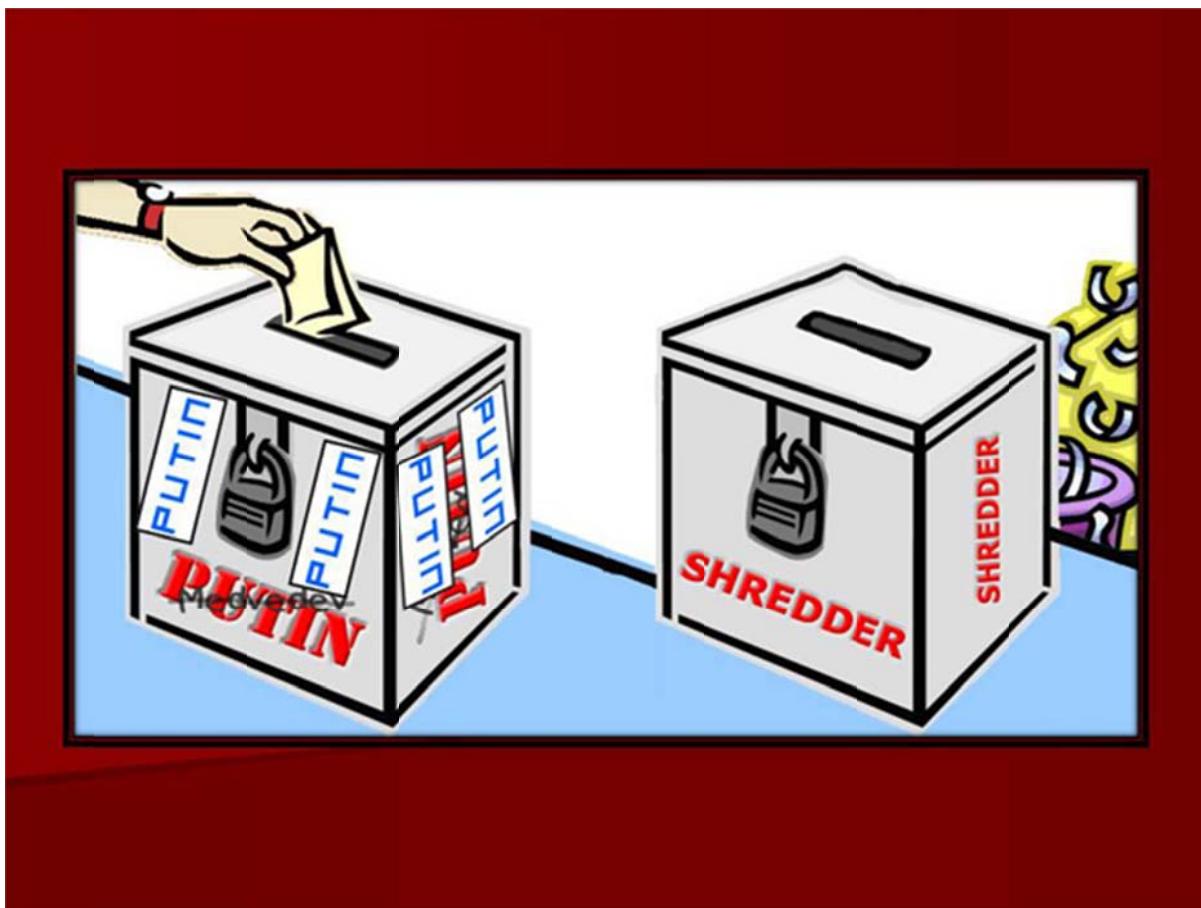


Many in the media and even some governments refer to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as "disputed territories," not occupied, ignoring the fact they were taken by military force. Often this is the same media that refers to parts of Palestine as "occupied" by Israel. Despite heavy pressure from Putin's Russia, Georgia has remained staunchly pro-democratic and pro-western,

and yet it appears that getting Russia into the WTO is of greater importance to this US administration than protecting the rights and territory of an ally.

Putin's administration has been quick to boast of this success, celebrating how they kept Georgia and Ukraine out of NATO. WTO membership will be another feather in this cap. Putin is making no concessions on Georgia and so far, his belief that doing business with Russia will trump protecting Georgia seems well founded. Even when a series of terror bombings in Tbilisi were tied to Russian intelligence, Hillary Clinton only politely hinted at this atrocity, at least in public. This is just the sort of display of weakness, a fear of public confrontation, that feeds the sense of impunity that has empowered dictators throughout history. The American "reset" policy with Russia began right after the Russian-Georgian war, spitting on the deal negotiated by Sarkozy and giving a clear indication of the Obama administration's priorities in the region.

I have no qualms about using that word, "dictator" when referring to Vladimir Putin, and nor should anyone else at this point. What has been clear to the Russian opposition for a decade should now be clear to any casual observer. Putin has no intention of ever giving up power. That Russia has these spectacles they call elections does not change anything. To make it clear, I have a picture here of a Russian polling station, updated again for the upcoming election. [SLIDE: CARTOON OF BALLOT BOXES, ONE TITLED "PUTIN" WITH "MEDVEDEV" SCRATCHED OUT AND THE OTHER BOX TITLED "SHREDDER"]



You can see they keep updating the box on the left, while the one on the right never changes. Here in the US your elections have fixed rules and unpredictable results. In Russia we have unpredictable rules and fixed results!

No new political parties have been registered in Russia since 2004. Putin's United Russia controls every step of the process: registration of parties, finances, campaigning, the media, and, of course, the counting. With every avenue of political opposition shut down, the regime has turned to closing off every form of public protest as well. In our marches, we are frequently outnumbered by riot police ten to one. Putin understands force, and makes an overwhelming show of force whenever he has the chance. [SLIDE: PHOTOS FROM RUSSIAN STREET PROTESTS AND POLICE ACTIONS]



We are proud that all the force used in all of these protests was on the side of the police. We have been entirely peaceful, with not even a broken windows, no burned cars.

In Moscow and St. Petersburg in particular, the voice of the opposition is rarely if ever allowed at all in public. Last week, Medvedev spoke at the Moscow State University journalism department, the famous *zhurfak*. Except Medvedev did not speak to University students there. The 300 members of the audience had all been brought in from outside groups loyal to the Kremlin while the actual students were not allowed to attend. Three students, three brave girls, who did try to get into the event were detained. This sort of circus is very much along the lines of the return to Soviet methodologies mentioned by Speaker Boehner in his remarks. These policies are promoted both internally and externally.

And please don't tell me about Putin's supposed popularity in Russia as a way of diminishing his oppression of the Russian people. How do you know? Not long ago, Hosni Mubarak enjoyed 90% approval in last December's elections. Qaddafi was probably near 100%. The high price of oil allows Putin to make payoffs and to increase the budget for internal security

forces and propaganda, even while the economic infrastructure collapses. If you must do business with Putin's Russia, that is business. But do not provide him with democratic credentials.

The systematic destruction of Russia's nascent democracy by Putin has increased its pace in recent years. This acceleration took place as soon as Putin realized he would face no real opposition in the West, no matter how many journalists were killed, how many activists were jailed, how many times gas to Europe was shut off. Here in the West there is a tragic assumption that dictators follow the same political logic as exists in democracies. In return, Putin's mentality has always been that democracy in the West is just another form of control, a successful model of keeping people in line. That is, he doesn't believe it is really about the power of the people or representation, but that the object is to make people think they have a voice, which makes them easier to control.

And you know what? Putin now thinks he has been proven correct! Every time America and other western leaders betray their founding principles it confirms Putin's belief that everything has a price, that everything is negotiable, that democracy and human rights are just chips on the table along with gas rights, trade treaties, and weapons agreements. Political freedom is for sale, just like the former German chancellor he hired to work for Gazprom, or the 10% of Facebook now owned by Russian oligarchs, or the New Jersey Nets.

Putin is happy to trade some small chips, things he doesn't really care about, as long as he concedes nothing on the things that really matter to him and his allies. He gives you something in Afghanistan and maybe you do not complain about rigged elections. He gets what he wants, and he doesn't have to worry about getting Congressional approval. (Not to give your administration any ideas.) Putin was a KGB lieutenant-colonel and you can view his regime's history as a series of case files.

[SLIDE: PUTIN AND SET OF CASE FILES LABELED: OPERATIONS MEDVEDEV; RESET; YUKOS, KADYROV, MAGNITSKY]



Most of you will be familiar with the famous cases of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his company Yukos. Eight years ago, on this very date, Yukos chairman Khodorkovsky was arrested and jailed. The richest man in Russia was sentenced to eight years, and would have been freed today had the Kremlin not decided to invent further charges against him in 2007, then this year finally sentencing him for another 12 years. In 2003 he was imprisoned for not paying taxes on the oil his company sold. This year, the charges were that he had stolen the oil he was arrested for not paying taxes on! Yukos was dismantled, its assets quickly sold off to Putin's cronies, and the money cleaned with a western IPO. Now Exxon has been brought in to share the benefits in an Arctic exploration deal with Rosneft, the main protagonist in the looting of Yukos. And by the way, this troubling collusion of American companies does not end with oil. There are serious concerns that the Kremlin is pressuring Microsoft to hand over the encryption keys to their popular online communication service Skype. We in the opposition in Russia, and those resisting many other dictatorships around the world, rely on Skype for our only secure communications.

And you know Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen warlord who boasted of killing his first Russian soldier at the age of 15, now put in charge of the devastated region by Putin. Kadyrov's agents have assassinated his enemies in other Russian cities as well as on foreign soil. It is hard to compare what Putin has done to the Russian Caucasus to anything else anywhere. He is not interested in attempting to better integrate these peoples, who are, after all, Russian citizens. Putin only wishes to ensure that the unrest does not affect the flow of money into the Kremlin.

And Operation: Reset, what a great KGB success! You thought it was an American plan, but that is why it has been so effective. You have been kept busy with working groups, summits, and other superficialities while Putin changes nothing. The most successful part of it has been Operation: Medvedev. It was a variation of the old Soviet game, letting the West think there is a chance of promoting moderates, of a rift in the hierarchy. Putin's announcement that he would be reclaiming the presidency makes it clear it was always the trick many of us said it was, that Medvedev has never been anything more than a shadow.

But the US spent considerable time trying to strengthen the supposed Medvedev faction, dreaming about a split between Putin and Medvedev, fantasizing about liberal reform despite all evidence to the contrary. A very successful operation indeed.

The success of Putin's Magnitsky operation is not yet guaranteed, and you here in this room have a say about its success or failure. The young Russian attorney, active against the Putin administration, died in police custody on November 16, 2009, just days before the one year he could be held without trial was due to expire. He had been tortured and denied visits and medical treatment. There was an impressively impassioned reaction to this horror both inside Russia and abroad. But two years later, we are seeing Russia's success at watering down these responses on the international front.

There have been moves here to take steps that would actually have an impact on the Putin regime by banning visits from those officials complicit in the Magnitsky case, possibly extending it to the Yukos case as well. This is the sort of tough action that would actually have an impact on the vertical of power in Russia, as the low-level bureaucrats begin to feel that Putin might not be able to protect them and all the money they have stashed in the West. And this is the key. The Putin regime is best understood not in political terms, but in criminology terms. Not Kremlinology, criminology! The minions and the oligarchs are loyal to Putin because he is the

capo di tutti capi and he offers them protection. They can commit any crimes they like in Russia, but as long as they stay loyal they can get rich and take their money to America, to London, wherever. This is why the possibility of a strong bill hitting such people caused such panic in the Kremlin. Top Putin fixer Vladislav Surkov even came here personally to threaten officials with reciprocity. Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov has promised Russia will make a ban list even longer than the Magnitsky list. Take these reactions as a good sign you are moving in the right direction!

Pushing back hard and setting a firm, even confrontational line, is the only message the Putin regime will respond to. They respect only strength. All this talk of engagement transforming Russia slowly has been disproven. 20 years ago it was expected that Russia would eventually embrace the manners of the West, but now it's clear the opposite has happened. Countries dealing with Russia have conformed again and again to the corrupt practices institutionalized by Putin. As I said in my testimony on the Hill last June, the system is not corrupt; corruption IS the system. So if you are going to go after these guys, you have to use banks, not tanks. Hit them in their wallets, because that is what they care about.

Senate Bill 1039, titled the "Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act" would do exactly that, it is a bill that has the real teeth that Speaker Boehner referred to. Just one bureaucrat punished for his participation in crimes against human rights and the rule of law would have a huge ripple effect in Russia. Sadly, the State Department has attempted to preempt such tough action by issuing their own 'secret' list for a travel ban on select Russian officials. This should be seen for what it is, watering down a serious effort with a superficial one. The entire point must be to publicize the list, to name names, to confront the criminals and their crimes. Make it clear there are standards that will be defended. Resolution and openness are the best weapons against a mafia structure.

Jackson-Vanik is an obsolete structure, of course, but do not trivially discard it without putting something in its place that makes clear America's commitment to human rights and its willingness to defend them. Senate 1039 is such a piece of legislation and I would urge everyone to make it a reality.

25 years ago, Ronald Reagan met with Mikhail Gorbachev in Reykjavik and the last Soviet leader had an ambitious reset proposal. I remember this meeting well. Reagan refused the

offer categorically, refused to make concessions to a system he understood to be evil, refused to compromise on principles where they mattered most.

How about this as a model for a reset with Putin's Russia? [SLIDE: REAGAN AT BRANDENBURG GATE ON JUNE 12, 1987]



Stand up for your principles. Make a reset that supports the Russian people, not our oppressors. Make that distinction clear. As in 1987, resolve is required. You must never be afraid to confront dictators because strength is the only language they understand.

To remove a dangerous virus, a reset or a reboot is not enough. The entire system must be replaced, and that is what we hope to do. Thank you.