

Friday, February 12, 2010

More

News, Quotes, Companies, Videos

# OPINION JOURNAL

Welcome, **Timothy D. Naegle** [Logout](#)  
[My Account](#) [My Journal](#) [Help](#)

**U.S. Edition** Today's Paper Video Columns Blogs Topics Journal Community

[Home](#) [World](#) [U.S.](#) [Business](#) [Markets](#) [Tech](#) [Personal Finance](#) [Life & Style](#) **Opinion** [Careers](#) [Real Estate](#) [Small Business](#)

[Leisure & Arts](#) [Letters to the Editor](#) [Political Diary](#) [Columns](#)

TOP STORIES IN  
**Opinion**

7 of 10  
**Garry Kasparov: The U.S. Goes Wobbly ...**

8 of 10  
**Notable & Quotable**

9 of 10  
**Terminator vs. Squirrel**

Th

OPINION | FEBRUARY 12, 2010

## The U.S. Goes Wobbly on Russia

*Iran's dictators feel secure too.*

**Article**

**Comments (61)**

[MORE IN OPINION »](#)

Email Print  + More

By **GARRY KASPAROV**

The first meeting of the loftily named U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission's Civil Society Working Group took place in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 27. Russian presidential first deputy Vladislav Surkov is the group's co-chair—despite a letter of protest signed by 71 GOP members of the U.S. Congress pointing out that Mr. Surkov is "one of the masterminds behind Russia's authoritarian course."

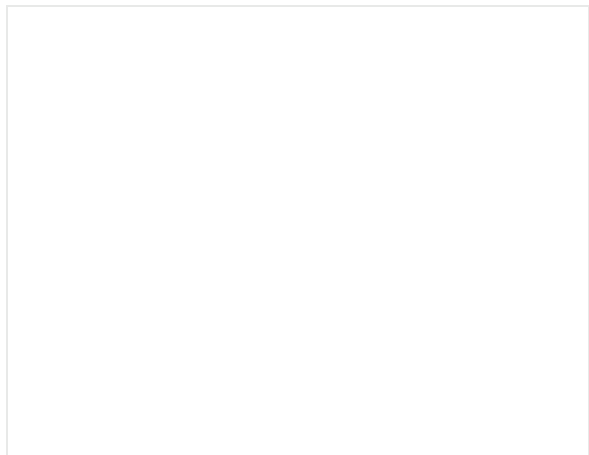
The letter urged President Obama (in vain, as it turned out) to boycott the meetings until Mr. Surkov was replaced, perhaps by someone who hasn't spent his career actively destroying the sort of civil society this working group is intended to promote. The group's American co-chair, Michael McFaul, National Security Council senior director for Russian affairs and a strong critic of Putinism in the past, said afterward that "maybe there was a time . . . when we could tell other countries what to do all the time." But failing to try is the only guarantee of failure.

One potentially awkward part of the D.C. meeting involved a presentation by the head of Transparency International, the corruption watchdog that on its latest list ranks Russia as No. 146 of 180 nations, between Kenya and Sierra Leone, and by far the lowest of the leading industrialized nations. But Mr. Surkov and his Kremlin allies feel no embarrassment, responding that the accusations were part of "negative stereotypes" and adding that the group would "try to avoid issues where we are unlikely to reach an agreement."

Mr. Obama's speech in Russia last July raised expectations that his administration would look at the Kremlin's record of brutality at home and transgressions abroad and attempt to ally itself with the beleaguered Russian people. He said, "governments which serve their own people survive and thrive; governments which serve only their own power do not." Instead of lines in the sand we have had words in the air, with dozens of these commissions established on the American president's initiative, each more pathetic than the last. This one on civil society is simply insulting.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's functionaries are happy to pass the time in the world's capitals being treated as equals instead of being berated for rigging elections and shamed for the growing list of dead Russian opposition figures. But why should the U.S. provide credentials of legitimacy and good faith to such people?

Last week, an advisory panel set up by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev released a report full of liberalization ideas, from returning to the election of regional governors to the employment of a multiparty framework and even eventual membership in the European Union. Yet the institute's head, Igor Yurgens, admitted in an interview on Gazeta.ru that in the end



[CLICK HERE for Full Article Access — and get](#)  
**TWO WEEKS FREE**  
  
**WSJ.com subscribers enjoy:**

- Deeper core business, industry, and market news
- Exclusive newsletters and alerts
- Save & share article functionality within the Journal Community

### People Who Viewed This Also Viewed...

[On WSJ.com](#) [In My Network](#)

- [Truth and Reconciliation](#)
- [High-Speed Spending](#)
- [Interview with Stephen Green: 'A Churchillian Defense of the Markets'](#)
- [Bill Wyman: What Newspapers Can Learn From Craigslist](#)
- [Notable & Quotable](#)

### Video

Mr. Putin will "make any decision he likes." He also said "free elections are impossible today because the Russian population is politically ignorant, passive, and dislikes democracy," and therefore "Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev should decide" who is to be president.

The U.S. is taking a weak approach to problems other than Russia—specifically, Iran, homeland security and the economy.

Nearly every day brings news of Iran's nuclear progress. The American response is always the same. The White House repeatedly makes statements about how "unacceptable" Iran's actions are and threatens sanctions it knows will not pass—thanks to China and Russia—and would not deter Iran's nuclear programs even were they to pass.

On homeland security, one maniac with explosive powder down his pants has become the mouse that roared, sending the bureaucrats and politicians into a frenzy. More charades. Travel delays are up, security costs rise by billions of dollars, and we're told that the attack was a failure? Not by the measure of total war, including economic war, that the terrorists have declared on the civilized world.

It's plain politics to make people feel safe instead of doing what's required to make them safer, and to admit that they can never be completely safe on an airplane or anywhere else. Instead of a profiling system in which 10% of the highest-risk passengers get 90% of the attention, we have a political-correctness culture that gives priority to protecting feelings instead of lives.

It is easier for a terror group to obtain a surface-to-air missile and blow a jetliner from the sky than to perform the attempted detonations we have witnessed recently. So why aren't such attacks common? A missile might kill hundreds, but it is a poor terror plot simply because there is so little that can be done about it. Antimissile systems would be installed—effective or not—and the self-inflicted economic impact would be negligible. One failed suicide bomber, on the other hand, and institutional paranoia and political grandstanding do the rest.

Massive U.S. borrowing, and the false sense of liquidity it produces, is currently all that is supporting large swaths of the debt-ridden Russian economy by providing cheap credit to the overextended oligarchs. Mr. Putin's cronies and other leaders sitting on failed economies benefit as America continues to move from Keynesian to Ponzian economics, desperate to postpone the inevitable reckoning. Runaway inflation in the U.S. is being put off because dollars are making their way out of the country—not by creating jobs or industry, but by boosting gains in the speculative stock and currency markets.

The Obama administration seems to be engaged in an endless campaign to make people believe these problems can and will be solved eventually instead of taking the tough steps required to solve them. It is true that doing what must be done can be a thankless task and that telling the truth does not always poll well. But promises are for candidates. Fulfilling promises is for leaders.

*Mr. Kasparov, leader of The United Civil Front in Russia, is a contributing editor of The Wall Street Journal.*

Email Printer Friendly Order Reprints

Share: [Social media icons]

**Russia**  
Taking a Trip to Russia? Save on Air, Hotel, and More!  
[www.Expedia.com](http://www.Expedia.com)

**Free Stock Report**  
Up to the Minute Stock Analysis.  
[www.Zacks.com/Stock](http://www.Zacks.com/Stock)

**Small Business Internet**  
Internet, Phone & TV Service All For \$99/MonthComcast Business  
[www.ComcastBusinessServices.com](http://www.ComcastBusinessServices.com)

**Add a Comment**

JOURNAL COMMUNITY

We welcome your thoughtful comments. Please comply with our [Community](#)

**The Scalia v. Stevens Smackdown**  
3:30

**The Drone Wars**  
6:52

**A Crime Theory Demolished**  
5:46

**More in Opinion**

- [Escape from Taxation](#)
- [Interview with Stephen Green: 'A Churchillian Defense of the Markets'](#)
- [Glenn Harlan Reynolds: What I Saw at the Tea Party Convention](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation](#)
- [High-Speed Spending](#)

**Most Popular**

Read Emailed Video Commented

- [1. The \\$555,000 Student-Loan Burden](#)
- [2. Opinion: Glenn Harlan Reynolds: What I Saw at the Tea Party Convention](#)
- [3. Greek Tragedy That Changed Europe](#)
- [4. Canada Redefines Itself in Ceremony](#)
- [5. Opinion: Escape from Taxation](#)

[Most Read Articles Feed](#)

**Latest Headlines**

- [Alabama Professor Killed Brother in '86](#)
- [Insurer Delays Rate Hike in California](#)
- [Obama Touts Return of 'Paygo'](#)
- [Boulder Struggles With Green Dream](#)
- [Police, Fire Departments Face Budget Axe](#)
- [Drug Industry Signals Lobbying Shift](#)
- [Fiscal Woes Push Up Class Sizes](#)
- [Bill Clinton Recuperating](#)
- [Even the Deep South Gets Snow](#)
- [Missionary Group's Lawyer Is Investigated by El Salvador](#)

[More Headlines](#)

MORE IN OPINION

Article Tools Sponsored by Constant Contact

rules. All comments will display your real name.

Empty text input field for comments.

Track replies to my comment

[Go to Comments tab](#)

CLEAR

POST

[CLICK HERE for Full Article Access](#) – and get

**TWO WEEKS FREE**

**UPGRADE NOW**

**WSJ.com subscribers enjoy:**

- Deeper core business, industry, and market news
- Exclusive newsletters and alerts
- Save & share article functionality within the Journal Community

**Editors' Picks**



**Love vs. Family in Hong Kong**



**Boulder Struggles With Green Dream**



**Greek Tragedy That Changed Europe**



**The Case for Private Space**



**Antigua's New Relaxation Machine**

[BACK TO TOP](#)

**WSJ.com Account:**

- [My Account](#)
- [Subscriber Billing Info](#)

**Create an Account:**

- [Register for Free](#)
- [Subscribe Now](#)

**Help & Information Center:**

- [Help](#)
- [Customer Service](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [New on WSJ.com](#)
- [Tour the new Journal](#)

**About:**

- [News Licensing](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Advertise Locally](#)
- [Conferences](#)
- [About Dow Jones](#)
- [Privacy Policy - Updated](#)
- [Subscriber Agreement & Terms of Use - Updated](#)
- [Copyright Policy](#)
- [Jobs at WSJ.com](#)

**WSJ.com:**

- [Site Map](#)
- [Home](#)
- [World](#)
- [U.S.](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Markets](#)
- [Market Data](#)
- [Tech](#)
- [Personal Finance](#)
- [Life & Style](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Small Business](#)
- [Corrections](#)

**Tools & Formats:**

- [Today's Paper](#)
- [Video Center](#)
- [Graphics](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Blogs](#)
- [Topics](#)
- [Guides](#)
- [Alerts](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Journal Community](#)
- [WSJ on Twitter](#)
- [WSJ on Facebook](#)
- [My Journal](#)

**Digital Network**

- [WSJ.com](#)
- [Marketwatch.com](#)
- [Barrons.com](#)
- [SmartMoney.com](#)
- [AllThingsD.com](#)
- [FINS.com](#)
- [FiLife.com](#)
- [BigCharts.com](#)
- [Virtual Stock Exchange](#)
- [WSJ U.S. Edition](#)
- [WSJ Asia Edition](#)
- [WSJ Europe Edition](#)
- [WSJ India Page](#)
- Foreign Language Editions:**
- [WSJ Chinese](#)
- [WSJ Japanese](#)
- [WSJ Portuguese](#)
- [WSJ Spanish](#)