



Soviet Russia Returns

An op-ed by Rep. Dan Burton [R-IN-05]

The fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War sparked a feeling of boundless optimism throughout the United States and the world. Many of us recognized that we were witnessing the end of an era of bitter rivalry, and had high hopes that we were entering an era of boundless east-west cooperation. For a short time, it appeared that the fairy tale ending we were so desperately hoping for would indeed come true. But as Russia emerges from the economic and social chaos of the 1990s, events seem to indicate that our fairy tale may quickly be degenerating into a nightmare.

For some time now, the Russian government under President Vladimir Putin has quietly and unobtrusively engaged in a systematic roll-back of democracy inside Russia. From the erosion of a free press, to the state takeover of privately-owned corporations, to overt pressure on civil service and non-governmental human rights organizations, and the proposed redrafting of the Russian constitution to allow President Putin to continue his reign, Russia has clearly taken several disturbing steps backwards towards the totalitarianism and command economy of the past.

Even more disturbing than the erosion of freedom inside Russia is Moscow's apparent and ominous return to the confrontational anti-American foreign policy doctrine that defined the Cold War. While the war in Iraq has shown us that even long-time allies can have policy differences, many of the actions taken by Moscow go beyond a simple difference of opinion. In fact, it appears to me that they are increasingly challenging America's leadership in the Global War on Terror and our efforts to spread freedom and democracy to all parts of the world.

Nowhere is this pattern more apparent than the Middle East, where Moscow has worked to bolster rogue regimes in Syria and Iran. Last year, Moscow attempted to sell portable missile systems to Damascus, a move which was only aborted after strenuous objections from the United States and Israel. More recently, Moscow has finalized the sale of missile defense weapons systems to Iran while at the same time interfering with international efforts to thwart Iran from achieving its nuclear ambitions. In fact, Moscow's commitment to a nuclear weapons-free Iran has been inconsistent, at best, and outright dubious at worst; and I believe the international community should view with skepticism any nuclear agreement with Iran brokered by Russia.

Consequently, I was not surprised to hear that Moscow threw open the Kremlin doors to the terrorist group Hamas, despite heavy criticism from the international community. Nor was I shocked to learn of Moscow's decision to continue funding Hamas in its political capacity, when nearly every other country worldwide has pulled its funding. Russia has attempted to excuse away its friendliness toward Hamas by asserting that Hamas won the Palestinian elections fair and square and, as such, must be recognized as the legitimate government of the Palestinian people.

