

*TU QUOQUE:*  
**HOW THE KREMLIN REDIRECTS EXTERNAL CRITICISM  
THROUGH RHETORICAL ATTACKS**

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*Of course, I am a pure and absolute democrat. But you know what the problem is -- not a problem, a real tragedy -- that I am alone. There are no such pure democrats in the world. Since Mahatma Gandhi, there has been no one. --*  
Vladimir Putin<sup>1</sup>

Authoritarian regimes have long used wordplay and rhetoric to defend themselves against criticism from democratic states. This was best demonstrated during the Cold War when communist governments claimed that they were democracies (of the “socialist” or “people’s” varieties) when they were clearly not. More recently, authoritarian governments have sought to use adjectives to obfuscate their illiberal tendencies -- for example, phrases such as ‘Islamic democracy’ and ‘developmentalist democracy’ have been used.<sup>2</sup> As the Russian Federation shifted toward authoritarianism during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, it should have come as no surprise that the Kremlin renewed this Soviet-era strategy through its use of the terms ‘managed’ and ‘sovereign’ democracy to describe Russia’s increasingly autocratic political system.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Russian government utilized the language of ‘diversity’ to assert that it has the right to define a uniquely ‘Russian’ path of democratic development, when, in fact, this ‘path’ led to greater autocracy. In both these instances, the Kremlin sought to *redefine* the problem of external criticisms of its political system: not only were Western critics simply wrong about the steps the government has taken to strengthen the state, their criticisms were also illegitimate since any attempt to ‘impose’ standards of democracy are akin to neo-imperialism.

Rather than remain solely on the defensive, Russia has also engaged in a more offensive policy of deflecting criticism from itself by accusing others of not living up to liberal democratic standards. This represents a strategy of *redirecting* criticisms outward. The quote by Putin which begins this paper is indicative of this approach. Putin’s claims that he is the sole democrat in the world -- implying that other, so-called democracies really are not -- would be laughable if it were not used to cover up the rise of autocracy in his country. Similar jibes at the West’s democratic credentials have also been asserted in recent years. However, this has taken a far more serious turn in Russia’s relationship with Estonia and, to a lesser extent, with the other Baltic States. In particular, the Kremlin has lashed out at Tallinn for its supposed violation of the rights of its Russian-speaking citizens. While there remain some significant problems in accommodating this demographic legacy of Soviet occupation, they do not rise to the level of

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<sup>1</sup> Bronwen Maddox, “‘I’m a Pure and Absolute Democrat. It’s a Tragedy That I’m the Only One’”, *The Times* (London), 4 June 2007, 6.

<sup>2</sup> David Bukay, ‘Can There Be an Islamic Democracy?’, *Middle East Quarterly*, 14/2 (Spring 2007): 71-79; David Collier and Steven Levitsky, ‘Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research’, *World Politics*, 49/3 (April 1997): 430-451.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, ‘Redefining Democracy in Russia: How the Kremlin Uses Wordplay to Counter External Criticism’, paper delivered at International Studies Association 2008 annual conference, San Francisco. This paper dealt exclusively with the issues of ‘sovereign democracy’ and ‘diversity’.

Russian human rights abuses in Chechnya or represent the systematic departure from liberal democratic values seen during Putin's tenure. The level of vitriol directed against Estonia in recent years has been far disproportionate to the nature of Tallinn's policies. Rather than describing reality, however, this was meant to place the West, rather than Russia, on the defensive because, by allowing Estonia into both the EU and NATO, the West was in effect endorsing what the Kremlin considered grave violations of democracy and human rights.

This paper explores the use of rhetoric against Estonia by the Russian government in an effort to *redirect* attention away from its steady progression away from liberal-democratic values. Section one introduces the subject of the Kremlin's pattern of *tu quoque* attacks against the West. The term *tu quoque* (Latin for 'you also') is an ad hominem legal defense in which the accused does not defend him/herself on the basis of fact or law, but rather points the finger at the actions of their accuser, claiming that they, too, have committed the same offense and therefore have no right to accuse another. This defense has been largely discredited because one can not exculpate oneself by identifying the crimes of others. Nevertheless, it continues to be used and is a powerful rhetorical tactic to project blame from oneself. The Kremlin's rhetoric against Estonia examined in subsequent sections are examples of *tu quoque* attacks. Section two outlines the contour of Russian attacks against the Baltic States generally, and Estonia in particular. It examines three assertions against Tallinn: that it violates the human rights of Russian-speakers; that it possesses a 'democratic deficit' because non-citizens were not allowed to vote in countrywide elections; and, that it glorifies Nazis. Section three explores how Russia has sought to utilize international organizations in its attempt to discredit the Estonian government. The final section examines the row over the so-called Bronze Soldier monument in which criticisms of Estonia reached new heights after the government in Tallinn moved a statue commemorating the retaking the country by Soviet troops in 1944 from the heart of the capital to a military cemetery closer to the city limits. This incident represented the culmination of the Kremlin's attempt to redirect the problems of human rights and democracy in the region from itself and onto others.

### *Tu Quoque*

In defending the state of Russia's political system from external criticism, Vladislav Surkov, the head of the presidential administration and a man widely thought of as the Kremlin's ideologue, argued that its democratic failings should be seen in light of those of the West throughout history: 'One of the most advanced democracies in the world [the United States] permitted segregation only 40 years ago, but it was regarded as a democracy. Well this country's culture apparently permitted segregation then. We understand it. We are like that too'.<sup>4</sup> At some level this is a perfectly legitimate argument: America's policy of segregation was indeed a democratic failing in that the country did not live up to its core beliefs as outlined in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Because of America's racist culture at the

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<sup>4</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 31 August 2006, 1, 3, reproduced as 'Sovereign Democracy for All', in *What the Papers Say, Part B*, 31 August 2006.

time, the abrogation of the rights of a large number of citizens was deemed socially and politically acceptable. As the country progressed toward living up to its principles, this policy was rightly discarded. Thus, democracy is not an end result, but a process. Similarly, Kremlin officials make the argument that they, too, are involved in a transition toward democracy and that occasional democratic shortcomings (or, as it is argued, policies which are incorrectly perceived to be undemocratic from the outside) are to be expected. It is therefore wrong for the West to expect perfection from a Russian government in transition.

The problem with this argument is that there are few to no substantive signs from the Russian government that it has made a fundamental commitment to democracy. In fact, rather than moving toward further democratization, the trend line is moving in the opposite direction. While, as Michael McFaul correctly observed, many of the policies of the Putin administration could be seen as aiming to strengthen state capacities, reverse centrifugal forces in the country, and establish a stable political system, “when analyzed together, the thread uniting these events is clear -- the elimination or weakening of independent sources of power,” especially when “Putin has not initiated one reform in the name of deepening democracy.”<sup>5</sup> If the Kremlin were as serious about democracy as its rhetoric claims, then there should be signs to this effect.

Kremlin officials have made other comments along similar lines which attempt to equate their own actions with those of the United States or to assert that their own version of democracy is in fact superior to that found in America. For example, Putin famously defended the Kremlin’s control over the media by asking, in effect, that if America’s free press were so free then why was Bush able to fire Dan Rather, an American news anchor who was removed from his position by his network (and not President Bush) after airing a story during the 2004 presidential campaign which used forged documents.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Surkov claimed that Putin’s consolidation of power is no different than the policies of former US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who expanded the powers of the federal government during the Great Depression and whom Surkov called twentieth century Russia’s ‘ideological ally’.<sup>7</sup> Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov argued that Russia was, in fact, more democratic than the US since America has fewer

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<sup>5</sup> “Sovereign Democracy and Shrinking Political Space,” *Russia Business Watch*, vol.14, no.2 (April-June 2006).

<sup>6</sup> John Hughes, ‘Lost in (Russian) Translation’, *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 April 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Steve Gutterman, ‘Kremlin Ideologue Likens Putin to Franklin D. Roosevelt’, *Associated Press*, 8 February 2007.

Political elites aligned with the Kremlin have pointed to FDR, who was elected to more than two terms as president, as an example that Putin should follow. However, the two-term limit was, at the time, merely an informal tradition, unlike the Russian constitution which prohibits more than two consecutive terms. See Viktor Khamrayev, ‘Vladimir Putin Asked to Follow Franklin Roosevelt's Example’, *Kommersant*, 9 February 2007, 3, reproduced in *Russian Press Digest*, 9 February 2007.

choices in its political system and elects its president in an undemocratic manner: in Russia ‘there are at least four parties in parliament, and not two, and where the people, and not the electoral college, select the president’.<sup>8</sup>

It is somewhat unclear whether these statements are truly meant to be willful misrepresentations or are merely misunderstandings of the American political system specifically and of democracy in general. For example, when Ivanov listed China and Russia alongside the US, the EU, India, Brazil, and Japan as fellow democracies,<sup>9</sup> was this a rhetorical tactic to equate the legitimacy of these seven governments or evidence that he is operating from a completely different definition of democracy than that commonly accepted amongst democracies? One can not be completely sure. Ultimately, the effect is the same: undermining the legitimacy of external criticism by redirecting attention away from Russia’s democratic failings and toward others. A clear case of this can be seen in the Kremlin’s attempt to place the West on the defensive by attacking Estonia for its purported liberal democratic failings.

### **The Rhetoric of the Russia-Estonia Conflict**

After the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the Soviet Union during the Second World War, ethnic Russians and other Russian-speakers migrated to the Baltics and altered the demographic balance in these states. This was most notable in Estonia and Latvia, where the titular nation’s overall population was reduced from ninety percent to sixty-four percent in Estonia and from seventy-seven percent to fifty-four percent in Latvia.<sup>10</sup> In order to preserve the cultural and ethnic identity of these countries, Tallinn and Riga introduced strict citizenship and language requirements after independence, effectively denying automatic citizenship to those whose families moved there after WWII.<sup>11</sup> Non-citizen residents must acquire a certain level of fluency in the titular language, as well as adhere to other requirements. Since most ethnic Russians did not speak Estonian or Latvian (neither of which is a Slavic language), hundreds of thousands of Russian-speakers were left stateless. Since the early 1990s, Moscow has complained vociferously about Estonia and Latvia’s treatment of Russia’s ‘compatriots’, as they are commonly referred to by Kremlin officials, and the human rights record of these countries. These complaints overlook two key facts: first, that many Russian-

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Combing All Democracies Anglo-Saxon Style Would be Wrong -- Ivanov’, *TASS*, 6 June 2007.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> For an overview, see Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Russians as the New Minority* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), 93-128.

<sup>11</sup> Ethnic Russians who could prove that their ancestors lived in Estonia or Latvia before World War II were automatically eligible for citizenship in these countries. Lithuania, which had a far smaller influx of Russian-speakers, gave automatic citizenship to all those living in the country at the time of independence.

speakers had started the process of acquiring citizenship by the close of the 1990s or had returned to the Russian Federation; second, that the level of human rights guarantees and democracy in the Baltics far exceeded those in Russia.

The language used by the Kremlin to describe conditions for Russian-speakers in the Baltics centered on three general themes: the human rights of the Russian-speakers were being violated; these states had a 'democratic deficit' because they did not allow non-citizens to vote in statewide elections; and, by seeking to reject the legacy of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states glorified Nazis. Although this rhetoric was used since the 1990s, it increased as Russia shifted toward greater authoritarianism after 2000 and as the Baltic states were scheduled to join both the EU and NATO in 2004. These events made it even more important that the Kremlin divert attention away from the contrast between its growing autocracy and the consolidation of democracy in Estonia and Latvia. Again, it is important to note that every year more Russian-speakers acquire citizenship in these states; as a result, the problem of stateless Russian-speakers should have become less of an issue. Moreover, given the membership criteria of the EU and NATO, which require that applicants meet high levels of democratic development and civil liberties, the liberal democratic credentials of these states should have been in even less dispute. Nevertheless, the Kremlin consistently exaggerated problems in these countries to serve its political ends.

An example of the type of language used to describe the human rights conditions for the Russian-speakers in Estonia can be found in statements made by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yuri Fedotov, in preparation for the 60th session of the United Nations Commission for Human Rights. Fedotov stated that Russia would seek the condemnation of Tallinn and Riga for 'violations of human rights' and 'undisguised discrimination' against Russian-speakers.<sup>12</sup> During the meeting itself, Fedotov repeated these claims, calling these violations 'serious'.<sup>13</sup> Later, he would refer to Estonia and Latvia as a 'sickness' in the heart of Europe.<sup>14</sup>

It is certainly true that the challenges faced by Russian-speakers in Estonia are real. At the time of Estonian independence, the vast majority of Russian-speakers had lived in Estonia for over two decades without needing to learn the local language and have found Estonian difficult to learn; others have been unwilling to learn Estonian, seeing it as a symbol of the end of Russian hegemony over the region.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, although Estonia's interethnic relations are

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0.'Russia to Employ International Organizations to Protect Rights of Russian Speaking People in Latvia, Estonia', *Economic News (RIA Oreanda)*, 24 February 2004.

<sup>13</sup> 'Summary Record of the 7th Meeting', United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 22 March 2004, E/CN.4/2004/SR.7, 12.

<sup>14</sup> 'Russia to Press Estonia, Latvia on Human Rights at UN Forum', *Agence France Presse*, 13 March 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Chinn and Kaiser, *Russians as the New Minority*, 97, 103.

free of violence (though the 2007 monument row discussed below raised some questions about this), having approximately ten percent of the country's population without citizenship and resentful of their newfound status as a minority is certainly not conducive to long-term stability.<sup>16</sup> However, Fedotov's statements are misleading. Over half the number of the non-citizens in 1991 have been naturalized and the share of ethnic Russians who have become Estonian citizens is increasing every year.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to Estonia's citizenship laws, which have become more liberal over time, Russia's citizenship's laws are actually quite strict, though there has been a push to ease naturalization in order to compensate for Russia's declining population. Moreover, the Kremlin's claims of the 'stateless' status of the Russian speakers is somewhat disingenuous: these individuals retain their Soviet passports for travel to Russia.<sup>18</sup> Russia could simply grant these individuals Russian citizenship if it so chose -- a precedent set by the Kremlin in Georgia when it granted citizenship to Abkhazians and South Ossetians without Tbilisi's consent. While this would likely cause problems with Estonia's NATO allies (since it may raise the specter of Russian irredentism), it seems that the Kremlin would rather have an issue than a solution to the problem. Finally, while language requirements for some professions have meant that Russian-speakers are effectively excluded from some jobs, a critical part of Estonia's ascension to the EU was predicated upon its adoption of human rights and minority protections, which Tallinn fulfilled. In fact, the European Commission held that, although there was room for some improvement, 'the rights of the Russian-speaking minority (both with Estonian nationality and without) are observed and safeguarded'.<sup>19</sup>

It is also not without some degree of irony that the Kremlin has called into question Estonia's commitment to democracy. Fedotov asserted that the inability of non-citizens to vote in Estonian parliamentary elections represented a 'a serious and long-term deficit of democracy' in the country.<sup>20</sup> The Russian Duma also called upon the EU to ensure that the democratic rights of non-citizens in Estonia and Latvia were respected by allowing them to vote in European

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<sup>16</sup> Steven Woehrel, 'Estonia: Current Issues and US Policy', Congressional Research Service, 11 July 2007, RS22692, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Citizenship', <[www.vm.ee/estonia/kat\\_399/4518.html](http://www.vm.ee/estonia/kat_399/4518.html)>.

<sup>18</sup> 'Moscow Calls on EU to Urge Latvia, Estonia to Naturalise Russian Minority', *Agence France Presse*, 21 December 2006.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, 'Agenda 2000 -- Commission Opinion on Estonia's Application for Membership of the European Union', 15 July 2007, DOC/97/12 <[ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/dwn/opinions/estonia/es-op\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/dwn/opinions/estonia/es-op_en.pdf)>.

<sup>20</sup> 'Summary Record of the 7th Meeting', United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 22 March 2004, E/CN.4/2004/SR.7, 12.

parliamentary elections.<sup>21</sup> Non-citizens are, in fact, allowed to vote in municipal elections and, if they so choose, are eligible for citizenship, as long as they learn Estonian. In addition, Tallinn's democratic credentials are otherwise without question: Freedom House rates Estonia a '1' for political rights and a '1' for civil liberties, the highest rating possible. Nevertheless, the Kremlin continued to condemn Estonia, even going so far as referring to it as a threat to Russian security. According to Sergei Ivanov: 'Countries that distance themselves from democratic norms and human liberties will as a rule become sources of danger to their neighbors, because they tend to provoke military and political tension....It is therefore why I, minister of defense, am forced to speak about the situation in Latvia, Estonia and some other countries in the [NATO] alliance'.<sup>22</sup> Again, this statement is quite ironic since it is Russia which had been steadily moving away from these norms, not Estonia. Moreover, it is unclear how Estonia, with a population of some 1.4 million people and a very small military, could be considered a threat to Russia's security, with one hundred times the population, a massive military, and thousands of nuclear weapons. However, the purpose here is clearly not to describe reality, but to advance the Kremlin's agenda of diverting attention away from its own democratic failings.<sup>23</sup>

The third line of attack against Estonia is that the government 'glorifies Nazis'. Given the unprecedented death and destruction that Germany caused during the Second World War, referring to political opponents as 'Nazis' is an attempt to discredit them, identify them as a danger to liberal democratic norms, and associate them with racism, fascism, and totalitarianism. In many ways, it is the worst political label that one could attach to another and is often used as a rhetorical device, devoid of any real connection to the tenets of National Socialism.<sup>24</sup> In the rhetorical battle between Moscow and Tallinn, the Kremlin has associated the Estonian government with the Nazis, asserting that they are actively engaged in 'continuing praise of supporters of the Nazis' and the 'persecution of anti-Nazi veterans and Soviet law enforcement personnel'.<sup>25</sup> This argument is based upon a fundamental divide between how the Baltic states

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<sup>21</sup> Alexandra Chebanu, 'Human Rights in Latvia, Estonia Should Be Ensured', *TASS*, 10 June 2004.

<sup>22</sup> 'Russian Defmin: Moscow Sees Estonia, Latvia as Sources of Threat', *Baltic News Service*, 13 July 2004.

<sup>23</sup> This is described quite eloquently by the Estonian Foreign Minister, Kristiina Ojuland, in a press conference given days after Ivanov's statement. *Estonian Radio*, 15 July 2004, reproduced as 'Estonian Foreign Minister Brands Russian Accusations as Demagoguery', in *BBCWM*, 16 July 2004.

<sup>24</sup> This is akin to Leo Strauss's notion of *reductio ad Hitlerum*, a logical fallacy which attempts to dismiss the arguments of another side by connecting them to something Adolf Hitler had supported.

<sup>25</sup> Yuri Fedotov qtd. in 'Moscow to Raise Topic of Baltic Russian-Speakers at Upcoming Meetings', *Baltic News Service*, 20 February 2004.



and Russia perceive the period during and after the Second World War. In 1939 the Soviet Union and Germany signed what came to be known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which, in accordance with a series of secret protocols, allowed for the USSR to acquire the Baltic states. Once WWII began, the Soviets invaded. However, once Germany attacked the USSR, some citizens from the Baltic states sided with Germany (including joining German military units) in order to fight against the Soviet Union, which was seen as illegally occupying their countries. With the Allied victory over Germany, the Baltic states were reincorporated into the Soviet Union, resulting in serious human rights abuses against the citizens of these states, including mass killings and deportations.

Politicians and commentators in the Baltic states make three assertions. First, both the initial incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR, and the subsequent annexation in 1944, were illegal, illegitimate, and should be considered an ‘occupation’ of the sovereign, internationally-recognized countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. This argument has formed the basis of the citizenship laws in Estonia and Latvia: since the occupation was illegal, the transfer of ethnic Russians into these territories was likewise illegal and in contravention of the Geneva Conventions; therefore, granting automatic citizenship only to those who can trace their lineage (regardless of ethnicity) to the pre-WWII republics is simply rectifying historical wrongs. Second, those who sided with the Germans against the Soviet Union were seeking to liberate their country from foreign occupiers. Actions by the Baltic states to recognize their sacrifice is legitimate because of the illegality of the occupation and it in no way condones the racist policies of Nazi Germany. Finally, the Baltic leaders have repeatedly sought global acknowledgment that the Soviet Union’s crimes are just as bad those of Nazi Germany in that they were both totalitarian regimes which committed massive human rights abuses. Only by recognizing the USSR’s horrific past, in particular its treatment of its neighbors, can the region fully heal the wounds of the Second World War.

The Russian government completely rejects these assertions, taking tremendous pride in the actions of the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War. They argue that the Baltic states joined the Soviet Union willingly after it ‘liberated’ these states. Therefore, their annexation was legal and should not be called an occupation. Any attempt to label it as such is an attempt to ‘rewrite the history of the Second World War’<sup>26</sup> and delegitimizes the sacrifices of the Soviet people during the Second World War. By extension, if the Soviet effort is discounted, then this implies support for the USSR’s opponent, Nazi Germany. Moreover, since the Soviet Union legally incorporated the Baltic states, those who moved there after the war were legal, internal migrants, especially those who fought in World War II. Again, if Estonia and Latvia refuse to grant citizenship to them and their descendants, Tallinn and Riga are, in effect, violating the rights of ‘antifascist veterans’,<sup>27</sup> making these governments, by implication, pro-fascist. Furthermore, those who fought against the Soviet Union from the Baltic states were not seeking

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

to liberate their country, but rather fought to ensure a Nazi victory and therefore should be considered illegitimate ‘Nazi accomplices’.<sup>28</sup> For example, a reunion of anti-Soviet soldiers (called ‘so-called freedom fighters’ and ‘bandit-like formations’) in Tartu, Estonia was blasted by the Russian Foreign Ministry as an indication of the growing ‘brown peril’ in Europe.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the Kremlin categorically rejects any attempt to liken the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany.<sup>30</sup> As Lavrov described it, it is ‘sacrilegious and dangerous to put an equality sign between liberators and [occupiers]’ (the USSR and Germany, respectively).<sup>31</sup> Since it is assumed that those who fought against the Nazis are inherently good (not necessarily a true assumption, but one used by the Kremlin to justify Soviet actions), by downplaying the differences between the two, the Baltic states are seemingly refusing to recognize the absolute the absolute evil of the Nazi regime; thus, it is argued, they are in fact seeking to rehabilitate Nazi Germany.<sup>32</sup> By implication, Tallinn’s citizenship laws are also associated with the racist policies of the Nazi regime, as seen by the effortless transition made by Kremlin officials from these historical arguments to discussions about the current status of Russian-speakers in Estonia.

This debate has developed into a largely unwinnable clash between two fundamentally different perspectives of history. Nevertheless, the Russian arguments are largely misrepresentations or exaggerations. The Soviet Union’s annexation of the Baltic countries was never recognized by the United States, most Western countries, or the governments-in-exile of these states. The legal basis of the Baltic states’ claims to an illegal occupation has significant strength in the historical record and international law, as seen by the 2004 European Court of Human Rights decision in *Penart v. Estonia*. Moreover, massive human rights abuses by the Soviet Union did, in fact, occur in these territories. The governments of the Baltic states have been very clear not to support Nazi ideology or to downplay the horrors of the Nazi period.

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<sup>28</sup> *Interfax News Agency*, 13 March 2005, reproduced as ‘Russia Says Will Use UN Forum to Slate Baltic Rights Record’, in *BBCWM*, 13 March 2005.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Moscow Slams Estonian Freedom-Fighters’ Reunion’, *Baltic News Service*, 19 July 2005.

<sup>30</sup> *RIA News Agency*, 12 June 2004, reproduced as ‘Russia Dismisses Estonian Demand for Apology as “Unfounded”’, in *BBCWM*, 12 June 2004.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Russia Opposed to Estonia Heroisation of Fascism -- Lavrov’, *TASS*, 20 December 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Also going on here is an attempt by the Putin administration to defend its incorporation of the Soviet past and achievements into the Russian Federation’s historical and political identity. Since the Russian Federation is advanced the successor to the USSR, the sins of the Soviet period have been consistently downplayed and Soviet leaders, including Stalin, have been at least partly rehabilitated. Thus, the arguments of the Baltic states -- from calling the annexation ‘occupation’ to claiming that, like Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union was a brutal, totalitarian state -- are seen as attacking Russian national identity itself. On the recent shift in historical memory in Russia, see Shawn Walker, ‘Putin Rewrites Russia’s School History Books Under Soviet-style Control Laws’, *The Independent* (London), 20 August 2007.

Instead, the Kremlin is engaged in a logical fallacy of equating criticism of the Soviet Union with being pro-Nazi. The governments of the Baltic states categorically refute the policies of Nazi Germany, but also say that the Soviet Union was bad as well. This neither dismisses the sacrifices made by those who fought for the USSR nor glorifies Nazis.

The purpose of the Kremlin's arguments is not historical accuracy, however. Like the arguments about human rights abuses and the Baltic states' democratic deficit, this is an attempt to place the West on the defensive. This was evident in a statement made by Sergei Ivanov at a ceremony honoring Russian diplomats killed during the Second World War: 'Attempts to make a mockery of history are becoming an element and an instrument of the foreign policy of certain countries....Unfortunately, certain organizations such as NATO and the EU connive with these attempts'.<sup>33</sup> In effect, Ivanov is arguing that the West has embraced a pro-Nazi government by admitting Estonia into its military and political institutions. Thus, international concern over liberal values, human rights, and democracy should not be directed at Russia, but elsewhere.

### **Russia, Estonia, and International Institutions**

The Kremlin has also utilized international institutions to deflect attention away from itself and redefine the problems of human rights and democracy as existing outside of Russia. This has come largely in two forms: attempting to place the European Union on the defensive by arguing that it is not doing enough to secure minority rights in Estonia and pushing international organizations to condemn Estonia. Associated with both of these tactics is a refusal to allow others to examine Russia's human rights record, even if it is done by the very same institutions which Russia has called upon to criticize others.

During the period leading up to the admission of the Baltic states to the European Union, Russia sought to ensure that Brussels would force Latvia and Estonia to implement new policies friendly to Russian-speakers. In a letter to the EU listing fourteen 'concerns', Moscow said that it wanted Riga and Tallinn to significantly ease the naturalization process, grant automatic citizenship to retired Soviet soldiers, create state-financed Russian-language high schools, and make Russian an official language in areas populated by Russian-speakers.<sup>34</sup> These concerns were raised in the context of Russia's assertion that the 1997 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between Moscow and Brussels would not automatically extend to EU newcomers and therefore would have to be renegotiated. In April 2004, the EU and Russia signed a protocol to the PCA and issued a joint statement in which both sides welcomed 'EU membership [for the new members] as a firm guarantee for the protection of human rights and the protection of persons belonging to minorities. Both sides underline their commitment to the

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<sup>33</sup> Steve Gutterman, 'Russian Foreign Minister Says EU, NATO Connive with Efforts to Rewrite History', *Associated Press*, 7 May 2007.

<sup>34</sup> 'Moscow Using Baltic Card to Pressure Brussels for Extra Bonuses', *Baltic News Service*, 31 January 2004.

protection of human rights and the protection of persons belonging to minorities'.<sup>35</sup> Russian officials took this statement to mean that the EU was now responsible for guaranteeing the human and minority rights of Russian-speakers in the Baltics and that any extension of the PCA to the new EU members (which needed to be ratified by the Russian Duma) would be contingent on the EU's policies.<sup>36</sup> This view was confirmed by the Russian Duma which adopted a declaration making relations between the EU and Russia contingent on this issue.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the Russian Foreign Ministry released its own statement which also linked Russia-EU relations to the status of Russian-speakers and asserted that the Baltic states were treating accession as 'a sort of 'letter of indulgence' permitting them to declare absence of a problem as such and to continue...to infringe on the rights of the Russian-speaking population in the most sensitive areas'.<sup>38</sup> While directed at the Baltic states, this also represented an indirect condemnation of the EU in that it questioned whether the organization held its applicants to the standards set out in the Copenhagen Requirements of 1993, which mandated that applicants guarantee 'democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and, protection of minorities'.<sup>39</sup> This criticism was made more explicit in other statements by Kremlin officials who argued that they did not, in fact, meet these requirements<sup>40</sup> or, if the EU believed that they did, then the requirements themselves are the problem.<sup>41</sup> Either way, the EU was accused of not living up to the joint agreement of April 2004 and having 'double standards' when it comes to human and minority rights protections: one which purports to advocate these principles when dealing with outside countries (particularly Russia and other non-democracies) and another for its members which are allowed to violate these principles with the tacit approval of the EU.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> 'EU and Russia Confirm Extension of the PCA to the Enlarged EU', 27 April 2004, <[www.eurunion.org/news/press/2004/20040062.htm](http://www.eurunion.org/news/press/2004/20040062.htm)>.

<sup>36</sup> 'EU, Russia to Continue Handling Minorities Issue', *Baltic News Service*, 28 April 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Serebrennikov, 'State Duma Urges Baltia States to Fulfill Human Rights Committments', *TASS*, 29 April 2004.

<sup>38</sup> 'Moscow to keep Issue of Estonian, Latvian Russian-Speakers on the Burner', *Baltic News Service*, 29 April 2004.

<sup>39</sup> European Union, 'Accession Criteria', <[ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement\\_process/accession\\_process/criteria/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/enlargement_process/accession_process/criteria/index_en.htm)>.

<sup>40</sup> See Sergei Lavrov's statement in 'Russia's Lavrov Again Slams Estonia, Latvia on Minorities', *Baltic News Service*, 19 October 2004.

<sup>41</sup> See Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Chizov's statement in 'Russia to Make Another Attack at Estonia, Latvia in Brussels', *Baltic News Service*, 23 November 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Kremlin officials have repeatedly made statements to this effect. See, for example, the statements by Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the Russian envoy to the EU, in Lyudmila Alexandrova

In addition to the EU, Russia sought to get the United Nations to denounce the Baltic states, such as the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). Russia raised the issue of Estonia in the UNCERD and the body issued a report critical of Tallinn's treatment of Russian-speakers.<sup>43</sup> The Kremlin's response to this document was one of vindication of its own criticisms of Estonia: 'The outcome of the committee's examination of Estonia's reports clearly demonstrates the validity of the international community's concern, including independent experts in the field of human rights, regarding continuing problems with ensuring basic human rights in the country'.<sup>44</sup> This response, however, ignored the several 'positive aspects' of Estonia's minority rights policies, which were prominently cited in the report.<sup>45</sup>

It should come as no surprise that Russia would also seek to find a sympathetic reception in the UNCHR, an institution which has had a problematic record of actually advancing the causes of human rights or democracy since most of its recent members were either non-democracies or routine violators of human rights which used the commission to attack the West and shield themselves from external criticism.<sup>46</sup> For example, some recent members of the UNCHR included China, Cuba, Libya, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, as identified above, Yuri Fedotov brought Russia's concerns to the UNCHR in 2004 and 2005. In 2006, Russia submitted a draft resolution clearly aimed at Estonia and Latvia to the United Nations Human Rights Council (the UNCHR's replacement), entitled, 'Human Rights and Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality'.<sup>47</sup> In a statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry asserted that this proposal was crucial to dealing with 'existing problems in this field in certain parts of the world, particularly in states that regard themselves as being advanced or established

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and Viktoria Sokolova, 'Moscow Unhappy About Russian-Speaking Minority in Latvia, Estonia', *TASS*, 9 November 2004 and Maria Danilova, 'Official: Russia and EU Make Some Progress, but Obstacles Remain', *Associated Press*, 19 December 2005.

<sup>43</sup> 'Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Estonia', 19 October 2006, CERD/C/EST/CO/7.

<sup>44</sup> *RIA Novosti*, 28 August 2006, 'Russia Claims Vindication by UN Report on Rights Abuses in Estonia', in *BBCWM*, 28 August 2006.

<sup>45</sup> 'Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination: Estonia', 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> Eventually this body was scrapped because its biases were seen as undermining the legitimacy of the entire United Nations system. Ladan Rahmani-Ocora, 'Giving the Emperor Real Clothes: The UN Human Rights Council', *Global Governance*, 12/1 (January-March 2006): 15-20.

<sup>47</sup> This was passed by the UNHRC and reported in 'Report to the General Assembly on the Second Session of the Human Rights Council', 22 March 2007, A/HRC/2/9, p.21.

democratic institutions'.<sup>48</sup> Again, according to the Russian government, the problem of human and minority rights, as well as democracy, is something that exists outside of Russia, especially in states which recently joined the EU, and therefore the West has no right to criticize Russian policies.

Russia also attempted to utilize European institutions to push its human rights agenda. In July 2004, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution which called upon Latvia and Estonia to enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation.<sup>49</sup> The Kremlin reacted quite positively to this outcome, repeatedly citing it to show that Tallinn and Riga were outside of the European mainstream.<sup>50</sup> However, the resolution that was adopted was far weaker than the one initially proposed by Russia and ultimately treated these states far more gently than subsequent Russian statements would lead one to believe.<sup>51</sup> Russia has had somewhat less luck since then in other European institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled against Russian-speakers in the Baltics, in decisions referred to by Kremlin-aligned officials as 'excessively politicised' (that is, not pro-Russian).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the June 2006 decision by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) to end minority rights monitoring in Latvia brought a sharp rebuke from the Kremlin.<sup>53</sup> These have been only some of the more recent setbacks for Russia's attempt to bring Western international institutions to bare against Estonia, leading the Russian

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<sup>48</sup> 'Adoption at the second resumed session of the UN Human Rights Council of the Russian Draft Resolutions "Human Rights and Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality" and "Integrity of the Judicial System"', <[www.chile.mid.ru/mre/e06\\_478.html](http://www.chile.mid.ru/mre/e06_478.html)>.

<sup>49</sup> 'Edinburgh Declaration of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly And Resolutions Adopted at the Thirteenth Annual Session', July 2004 <[www.oscepa.org/admin/getbinary.asp?FileID=531](http://www.oscepa.org/admin/getbinary.asp?FileID=531)>.

<sup>50</sup> For example, see Natalia Simorova, 'OSCE Concerned Over Russians in Latvia, Estonia -- FM', *TASS*, 16 July 2004; Natalia Simorova, 'Moscow Regrets Estonian FM's Remarks About Russia', *TASS*, 19 July 2004; 'Russia's Lavrov Again Slams Estonia, Latvia on Minorities', *Baltic News Service*, 19 October 2004; Vitaly Kuchkin and Olga Levitskaya, 'Latvia, Estonia Ignore OSCE Recommendations -- Russian FM Official', *TASS*, 22 November 2004.

<sup>51</sup> 'OSCE Resolution Re National Minorities Not Harsh on Estonia', *Baltic News Service*, 7 July 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Boris Gryzlov qtd. in Diana Rudakova, 'Some Rulings of Human Rights Court Excessively Politicised', *TASS*, 29 May 2006. Also see 'Russian MFA Information and Press Department Commentary Regarding Examination in European Court of Human Rights of the Sysoyevs vs. Latvia Case', <[www.mid.ru/Brp\\_4.nsf/arh/BB84499C98376C7BC3257188004F3AA6](http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/BB84499C98376C7BC3257188004F3AA6)>.

<sup>53</sup> Yelena Volkova, 'Moscow Bewildered by PACE's Decision to Stop Dialog with Latvia', *TASS*, 29 June 2006.

government to accuse them, in effect, of giving Tallinn a pass on its treatment toward its Russian-speaking minority. Specifically, the West is accused of being 'timid',<sup>54</sup> participating in 'indifference and connivance' toward the Russian-speakers,<sup>55</sup> and applying 'double standards' to Russia and the Baltics.<sup>56</sup> This final accusation, of double standards toward human rights and democracy, is particularly interesting since Moscow itself has long sought to use international institutions to criticize others, but refuses to allow these same organizations to examine its deteriorating record on human rights and democracy.

The touchiest subject for the Kremlin has been the ongoing conflict in Chechnya, where Russia has been accused of massive human rights abuses in the first (1994-1996) and second (1999-2000) Chechen wars. The Kremlin has sought to portray these conflicts (especially the second war) as part of the international struggle against terrorism. According to reports, Russian and EU officials held talks on human rights in 2005 and, while Moscow repeatedly brought up the situation in the Baltics, 'Russian officials again called the attention to their European partners to the fact that it is hopeless and counterproductive to speculate in the human rights situation in Chechnya'.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, before the UNCHR, where he attacked the Baltics for their human rights policies, Fedotov accused those who criticize Russia for its policies in Chechnya of '[misusing] human rights rhetoric for justifying terrorists'.<sup>58</sup> In addition to Chechnya, Russia's minority rights policies -- in the Mari El Republic, whose Finno-Ugric population are akin to the Estonians -- have placed Moscow on the defensive, much to the seeming joy of Tallinn which

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<sup>54</sup> Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko in *ITAR-TASS*, 22 November 2005, reproduced as 'Russia Urges Europe to Stand Up for Russian Minorities in Baltic', in *BBCWM*, 22 November 2005; Russia's envoy to the EU, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, in Maria Danilova, 'Official: Russia and EU Make Some Progress, But Obstacles Remain', *Associated Press*, 19 December 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Russian envoy to the OSCE, Alexei Borodavkin, 'Russia Envoy at OSCE for Objective Assessment of Events in Estonia', *TASS*, 3 May 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Chairman of the Duma's International Affairs Committee, Kostantin Kosachev, in Lyudmila Alexandrova and Viktoria Sokolova, 'Moscow Unhappy About Russian-Speaking Minority in Latvia, Estonia', *TASS*, 9 November 2004; Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Valery Agarkov and Anna Kurbanova, 'EU Protects Riga, Tallinn from Criticism Over Human Rights -- FM', *TASS*, 20 October 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Alexandra Ursova, 'Russia, EU Agree to Hold Regular Human Rights Consultations', *TASS*, 2 March 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Sam Cage, 'Treatment of Russian Speakers in Baltics in 'Baltant Violation' of International Standards', *Associated Press*, 17 March 2005.

has taken the opportunity to accuse Moscow of its own 'double standards'.<sup>59</sup> Finally, in a closed-door European Parliament meeting on human rights issues, Lavrov reportedly ignored the set agenda items and focused instead on the situation in the Baltics, while at the same time rejecting the legitimacy of any criticisms by the EU of itself or its allies as an attempt to impose Western values upon others.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Bronze Soldier Monument Row**

In 2007, the conflict between Russia and Estonia rose to a new level over the so-called Bronze Soldier monument. The short version of these events is as follows. In January 2007, the Estonian government approved the removal of a monument installed in the heart of Tallinn to commemorate the third anniversary of the Soviet Red Army retaking the country in 1944. The monument became a physical representation of the controversy over Estonian-Soviet historical memories: after Estonian independence, the statue became an important symbol for many Russian-speakers who saw it as a representation of the continuity between themselves, their Soviet past, and their current ties to Russia; by contrast, many Estonians saw the monument as a symbol of Soviet domination over their country and wanted it removed. When the Estonian government sought to move the monument (as well as the remains of Soviet soldiers buried on the site) to a military cemetery elsewhere in the city, days of mass protests, rioting, and looting erupted in late April 2007. Estonian police responded with force and one Russian citizen was killed -- the reasons why a Russian citizen was involved in protests in Estonia and who killed him both remain unclear. Within days, the monument was moved and a rededication ceremony was held in time for Victory in Europe Day. The Russian government reacted harshly to these events and a Kremlin-aligned youth movement besieged the Estonian embassy in Moscow. In addition, government and private Estonian websites were flooded with denial-of-service attacks, which Estonian officials claimed were directed from the Kremlin and represented the first 'cyberwar'.

What is interesting about this series of events is that the rhetoric used by the Kremlin to attack Estonia represented the crystallization of the Russian government's attempt to redirect the problems of human rights and democracy in the region. The Estonian government may easily be accused of having been insensitive, provocative, and acting in a politically-motivated manner.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the level of vitriol displayed by Russian officials was in no way proportionate to the actions of the Estonian government. The Russian response was so exaggerated that it had the

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<sup>59</sup> 'European Parliament to Discuss Situation of Russia's Mari Minority', *Baltic News Service*, 10 May 2005; 'Russian Ambassador to Estonia Defends Moscow's Ethnic Minorities Policy', *Baltic News Service*, 19 October 2005.

<sup>60</sup> *Eesti Päevaleht* (Tallinn), 18 May 2006, reproduced as 'Foreign Minister Lavrov Raises Issue of Russian Minorities in Estonia, Latvia', in *BBCWM*, 23 May 2006.

<sup>61</sup> This last point is relevant because the vote to remove the monument came as the two main parties in Estonia's ruling coalition were in a tight parliamentary election campaign.



effect of uniting the West behind Tallinn and unintentionally reminding those in the region of the stark differences between Russia and the democratic world.

After passage by a two-thirds majority in the Estonian parliament in January 2007, President Toomas Hendrik Ilves signed legislation approving the removal of the Bronze Soldier statue to a military cemetery and the reburial of the Soviet soldiers. This sparked an immediate, negative reaction from the Kremlin and Kremlin-aligned politicians. Konstantin Kosachev, the chairman of the Duma's International Affairs Committee and United Russia member, called it 'immoral', 'offensive', 'a desecration', and 'another chapter of the heroization of Nazism'.<sup>62</sup> Other government officials used terms such as 'blasphemous'<sup>63</sup> and 'monstrous'.<sup>64</sup> A few days after the Estonian bill was signed, the Duma unanimously passed its own bill whose title alone, 'On the Demonstration of Neo-Nazi and Revanchist Mood in Estonia', made plain the feelings of the Russian legislature and tapped into Russian rhetoric about the liberal credentials of the Estonian government.<sup>65</sup>

Once the riots over the monument's removal erupted, this rhetoric was taken to another level. Lavrov said that 'the Estonian government has spat on values' and the Duma called for diplomatic relations with Estonia to be broken off and the enactment of economic sanctions.<sup>66</sup> Several Kremlin-aligned officials focused on what they considered Tallinn's liberal democratic and human rights failings. For example, Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov said that the Duma was seeking 'to attract attention to the challenging flouting of human rights in Estonia and demand the severest reaction from the international community'<sup>67</sup> and Kosachev said that Western international organizations should take a stand against this 'violation of elementary norms of human morals'.<sup>68</sup> Mikhail Margelov, the chairman of the Federation Council's international

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<sup>62</sup> 'Estonian President Signs Bill Allowing Removal of Controversial Red Army Statue', *Associated Press*, 11 January 2007; 'Russia Intends to 'Defend' Remains of Soviet Soldiers in Estonia', *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 15 January 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Sergei Lavrov qtd. in 'Russia Harshly Criticizes Planned Removal of Red Army Statue in Estonia', *Associated Press*, 16 January 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Russia's ambassador to Estonia, Nikolai Uspenski, qtd. in 'Estonia Provokes Storm with Soviet Statue Vote', *Agence France Presse*, 15 February 2007.

<sup>65</sup> 'Russian Lawmakers Criticize Estonia for Planned Removal of Red Army Statue', *Associated Press*, 17 January 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Jari Tanner, 'Estonia Removes Soviet Monument Amid Riots, Russian Warns of Sanctions', *Associated Press*, 27 April 2007.

<sup>67</sup> 'Duma Speaker Demands Severest Reaction to Estonia's Actions', *TASS*, 28 April 2007.

<sup>68</sup> 'Russian MP Calls for PACE Debates on Situation in Estonia', *TASS*, 28 April 2007.

affairs committee, urged human rights organizations and democratic international institutions to ask the following question of the Estonian government: 'May one speak about you sharing European values, common for all us Europeans -- the supremacy of the law, human rights and democracy -- while at the same time trying to defend yourselves with such barbaric methods? European values and barbarism are incompatible concepts'.<sup>69</sup> A similar argument was expressed by Lavrov, who criticized the 'cruel violence' of the Estonian government and 'expressed bewilderment over the absence of the proper reaction of the European Union to the actions of Tallinn that contradict European values and culture'.<sup>70</sup>

When taken in context, however, these comments emerge as little more than willful exaggerations and political rhetoric. On the one hand, the Estonian government neither destroyed the statue nor desecrated the remains of the Soviet soldiers buried at the monument. The site's location was deemed inappropriate because of its central location in Tallinn and the emotions surrounding it. Regardless of one's position on the history of Estonian-Soviet relations, the former prime minister of Estonia, Mart Laar, was correct in saying that it 'was one of the most hated monuments in Estonia'.<sup>71</sup> Since, as the Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip said at the time, 'monuments must unite people, but this monument in question is splitting the people',<sup>72</sup> the decision was made to move it somewhere more appropriate and less controversial. In addition, the remains of the soldiers were either reburied or returned to their families. Thus, it could not be honestly said that the actions of the Estonian government rose to the level of 'blasphemy'. On the other hand, it is also important to reiterate that the action could be legitimately seen as insensitive and provocative toward the Russian-speakers, some of whom already perceived of themselves as being victims of discrimination. Nevertheless, while the Estonian government maybe should have been more concerned with the feelings of this minority, the Finnish Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen was also probably correct in writing that it 'cannot be a human rights issue'.<sup>73</sup> Certainly it was of an emotional symbolic nature, but moving the statue did not violate the fundamental rights or civil liberties of the ethnic minority population. If they had destroyed it, then the ethnic Russians and the Russian government may have had a legal or moral argument; but that simply did not happen. Moreover, the Russian government's comments were more than ironic coming just weeks after the Kremlin's heavy-handed

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<sup>69</sup> *Channel One Worldwide* (Moscow), 28 April 2007, reproduced as 'Russian Senator Calls for International Pressure on Estonia', in *BBSWM*, 28 April 2007.

<sup>70</sup> 'Russian-Estonian Row Ongoing', *Xinhua General News Service*, 3 May 2007.

<sup>71</sup> 'Ex-Estonian Leader Suggest Baltic States, Russia Form Commission', *Associated Press*, 4 May 2007.

<sup>72</sup> 'Estonian President Signs Bill Allowing Removal of Controversial Red Army Statue', *Associated Press*, 11 January 2007.

<sup>73</sup> 'Tallinn Memorial: Vanhanen Emphasises Non-interference, Kanerva Calls for EU Solidarity', *Helsingin Sanomat*, 30 April 2007 <[www.hs.fi/english/article/1135226921208](http://www.hs.fi/english/article/1135226921208)>.

crackdown on peaceful protests by anti-regime activists in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The protesters in Tallinn were far more violent than those in Russia and the Kremlin's reaction to its own protesters was equal to or even more forceful than that of Tallinn.

In addition to the events in Tallinn itself, the political crisis and rhetoric crossed into Russia. Kremlin-aligned youth groups (including Nashi and Young Russia) blockaded the Estonian embassy in Moscow for over a week and some activists even attempted to physically assault the Estonian ambassador when she tried to give a press conference at the offices of *Argumenty i Fakty*.<sup>74</sup> One Russian newspaper criticized the Kremlin for allowing the protests against the Estonian embassy in clear violation of Russian domestic law and international law while, by contrast, cracking down on anti-government protesters just weeks before.<sup>75</sup> In addition, a series of denial of service attacks -- in which an internet site is flooded with hits in order to make it unavailable to viewers -- were launched against Estonian websites. Estonian officials claimed (though could not confirm) that these attacks were from internet addresses connected to the Kremlin, making this possibly the first ever government-coordinated 'cyberwar'.<sup>76</sup>

The outcome of these events was probably not as the Russian government had intended.<sup>77</sup> The Kremlin's claims about human rights abuses in Estonia only made the contrast between Russia's official commitment to liberal democratic values and the reality that much more stark. During this diplomatic row, Ilves visited Georgia to express solidarity with another democratic country also pressured by Russia. There he proclaimed, 'Democratic countries should stay

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<sup>74</sup> Jari Tanner, 'Estonia Re-Erects Statue at Military Cemetery Amid Protests', *Associated Press*, 30 April 2007; Maria Danilova, 'Dispute Between Russia and Estonia Over War Memorial Heats Up in Moscow', *Associated Press*, 2 May 2007.

<sup>75</sup> *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 4 May 2007, reproduced as 'Moscow Daily Says Estonian Embassy Siege "Shameful", "Unlawful"', in *BBCWM*, 4 May 2007.

<sup>76</sup> Mark Landler and John Markoff, 'First War in Cyberspace: The Lessons of Estonia', *International Herald Tribune*, 29 May 2007, 1; Joshua Davis, 'Hackers Take Down the Most Wired Country in Europe', *Wired Magazine*, 21 August 2007, <[www.wired.com/print/politics/security/magazine/15-09/ff\\_estonia](http://www.wired.com/print/politics/security/magazine/15-09/ff_estonia)>.

<sup>77</sup> It is important to understand that Russian actions may have multiple objectives. Few foreign policy choices emanate from a single cause or purpose. In addition to placing the West on the defensive, the Kremlin likely also sought to give itself a political boost by appealing to nationalist emotions within the country and distracting ordinary Russians from problems at home. This seems to have worked. In an opinion poll by the Levada Center taken in the immediate aftermath of the monument crisis, some sixty percent of Russians saw Estonia, a country with a population of 1.4 million, as the 'worst enemy' of Russia, a country of 140 million. Lyudmila Alexandrova, 'Russians See Best Friends, Arch Foes among Former Soviet Republics', *TASS*, 1 June 2007.

together'.<sup>78</sup> In fact, this appeared to be the case: rather than placing it on the defensive, Russia's response to the monument row united the West against what was perceived as an increasingly antagonistic and authoritarian Russia. For example, NATO countries expressed their deep concern with the Russian government's inaction (or actions, given the link between the youth groups and the Kremlin) against the embassy of their fellow alliance member.<sup>79</sup> Bush also made a powerful show of support for Estonia in the midst of the diplomatic crisis by announcing that he would welcome the Estonian President to the White House.<sup>80</sup> The European Parliament, as well as individual EU members, called upon European countries to stand with Estonia against Russia.<sup>81</sup> Finally, despite Russia blasting the human rights records of Estonia and Latvia as being 'unacceptable and unworthy of Europe' at a May 2007 Russia-EU summit,<sup>82</sup> EU leaders, including the president of the EU, Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the president of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, reportedly stood up to the Russian leader, despite a previous pattern of reluctance to confront Russia on human rights issues.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Russia's rhetorical defense against external criticisms of its increasingly authoritarian political system has assumed two forms: one defensive (the 'sovereign democracy' argument) and the other offensive (attacks against the democratic and human rights credentials of others). This paper examined the latter. Although both have been presented as promoting a liberal agenda -- creating the ideological basis of democracy in Russia and supporting human rights abroad -- these are based upon fundamental misrepresentations or exaggerations. While there is always room for improvement in every country's human and minority rights policies, a difference must be made between those governments which have made a fundamental commitment to liberal democracy and those which have not. Clearly, the Kremlin has steadily shifted toward the second category. By contrast, although there remain problems with integrating Russian-speakers into its political system, Estonia has made this commitment. Nevertheless, the Kremlin has persisted in condemning others while resisting any scrutiny of

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<sup>78</sup> 'Georgian, Estonian Presidents Vow to Stand Together Against Russian Rhetoric', *Associated Press*, 7 May 2007.

<sup>79</sup> 'NATO Statement on Estonia', <[www.nato.int/docu/pr/2007/p07-044e.html](http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2007/p07-044e.html)>.

<sup>80</sup> 'Bush to Host Estonian Leader Amid Russia Dispute', *Agence France Presse*, 4 May 2007.

<sup>81</sup> *Ekho Moskvyy Radio*, 11 May 2007, reproduced as 'Russian MP Criticizes EU Resolution Defending Estonia', in *BBCWM*, 11 May 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Dario Thuburn, 'EU, Russia Clash over Democracy at Volga Summit', *Agence France Presse*, 18 May 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Anne Penketh, 'Merkel Rounds on Putin over Arrest of Protesters', *The Independent* (London), 19 May 2007, 3.

itself. Like its assertion of the democratic nature of sovereign democracy, no matter how many times it accuses Tallinn of gross human rights abuses, it does not change the fact that Estonia is far freer than Russia.

However, the ultimate purpose of these policies is not to accurately reflect reality, but rather to obfuscate the differences between democratic and authoritarian states. In this, Russia is assuming the form of one of democracy's 'doubles' -- 'regimes that claim to be democratic and may look like democracies, but which rule like autocracies'.<sup>84</sup> As authoritarian regimes seek to manipulate the language of democracy in order to place democratic countries on the defensive and weaken their resolve to promote democracy abroad, the strategy of *redirecting* criticism outwards adds another level to the growing struggle developing in the current international system between autocracy and democracy: one which exists in the realm of definitions, perceptions, and framing.

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<sup>84</sup> Ivan Krastev, 'Democracy's "Doubles"', *Journal of Democracy*, 17/2 (April 2006): 52-62 (52).