

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

PUTIN, RUSSIA, AND THE WEST

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. HILL: I'm Fiona Hill, the director of the Center for the United States and Europe, and I feel like I should have been handing out popcorn at the entrance. But I do hope that people have got cookies and coffee and tea.

This is something of an unusual event for us in terms of screening a documentary. Some of our other programs do this, but actually this is a first for our center, which we're very thrilled about, but the topic is not an unusual one for us.

Many of you will have already heard of this wonderful BBC series, *Putin, Russia, and the West*. We are very lucky today to have the director and director and producer of the series, Norma Percy and David Alter, here with us who are in town making their next documentary, which is on Iraq.

You may have heard of Brook Lapping, it's one of Britain's -- in fact, one of the world's -- top documentary film -- they're looking modestly here, but it's very true -- film production units. They have made an array of very well-known documentaries. Norma herself has worked on a whole series on the Russian Revolution and also on the fall of Yugoslavia. They've done some unusual things. When I was looking through some of the things that Brook Lapping have done, I was amazed to see that you've done a couple of sessions on Shark Week. So, I'm now imagining Norma and David not just out there interviewing politicians, but in some kind of shark cage deep down in the ocean trying to get different kinds of sharks from the usual Washington -- you didn't do that, no? That wasn't you? Yeah, can't tell the difference. Go ahead.

They've also done documentaries on Catherine the Great, who must have been a very interesting interview subject, sessions in Versailles, and then a very highly acclaimed series on Iran and the West, which I think the Russia series fits well into.

This is a four-part series, and sadly we couldn't quite get our act together to do a full four-hour screening. So what we're going to do today is show the first session, the *Rise of Putin*, the first in the four-part series. And number three in the series, which covers Russia and the war with Georgia in 2008 will be shown by our colleagues next door at Carnegie, if any of you are interested. On Monday the 26th, in the lunchtime slot -- I'm actually losing in my pile of papers here exactly when this is -- but from 12:30 to 2:00 at the Carnegie Endowment on Monday, March 26, there will be the episode covering the war with Georgia back in 2008.

The other parts of the documentary, National Geographic is showing a 90-minute version. It's a very condensed version of the four-part series that -- has it already been shown? Maybe it's already been on National Geographic TV. You can also catch some of the documentary on YouTube. And of course, Norma and David would be thrilled if you actually bought the whole series, and I can highly recommend this.

But I'm going to turn over to Norma and David to tell you just a little bit about the film before we begin. And then at the end of the hour session, we'll do a quick Q&A and you can ask them more questions about what it was like making this documentary, as well as swimming with sharks.

MS. PERCY: I'm afraid not. (inaudible) other colleagues did so and Catherine the Great, but we did do the second Russia revolution and we did do the death of Yugoslavia.

I mean, what we do, what I've been doing with my colleague, Brian Lapping, for, well, more years than I'm going to tell you, is to look at big international crises and try and recreate what happens inside the room when the really big decisions are taken. And we do that by interviewing as many of the top people who were there, who will give us interviews, and their close aids and advisors, and trying to really give a

truly multi-sided account of what happened inside these rooms.

The first one we did like this was the second Russian revolution. We were a small, independent company and the BBC commissioned us to do something about Gorbachev. This was 1989, so off I went to the Soviet Union. When we finally met our first Politburo member, I said to him, well, we want to tell this history like a story. So, tell us about the Politburo that selected Gorbachev, just like you went home and told your wife that evening. And the look of such complete horror that went onto his face at the idea of telling his wife what happened in Politburo was really something to be seen.

(Laughter)

But we were really lucky because while we were there, while we were searching and filming, Gorbachev's Glasnost took off and people got more and more open. And by the time we finished filming, Politburo members -- my favorite one was someone called Vitaly Vorotnikov -- was telling us everything. I mean, the Soviet rules were off and they didn't kind of know the rules that Western politicians play by, and it was a very good series.

And then after the coup -- if I say so myself -- after the coup on the 19th of August that toppled Gorbachev for a week, we went back to make two more. And at that point, Gorbachev saw the original series on television and insisted we interview him. So, the last two programs were particularly good.

So, when we finished our last series in 2009, *Iran and the West* -- which is another long story -- Glasnost was going the other way while we were making that one. The BBC suggested that since it was 20 years since the fall of the Soviet Union that we go back to Russia and do it again. But this time, we were commissioned to do something different. The second Russian Revolution was internal: Gorbachev's policies, the fall of the Soviet Union -- this was Russia and the West. And so I want to say, you know, what

we set out to do.

First of all, it was Russia and the West. It was under Putin and then Medvedev. It wasn't how Putin came to power. That's because there had been some good programs already. One of them was actually made by my colleague, Paul Mitchell, who sadly isn't here because he's the brains behind this first program. It wasn't about Putin's internal policies. It was about Putin's relationship with the West.

I also have to apologize, as this is Brookings, which I'm told is the Democrats at play.

MS. HILL: No, no, no. We're not partisan. It just seems to be a few Democrats here because they're not, you know, all -- not all of them are in government at the moment.

MS. PERCY: Right, okay. We start, really, when Bush comes to power because it seemed to us that the first year when Clinton -- it was still the Clinton Administration. Putin was still really treading water and kind of waiting to see what Bush was going to be like before he did anything in his relations with the West. So as you'll see, that's what it's about.

But by the time we finished -- so we started -- we first went to Russia in December 2009, and it was a long and arduous process of persuading the top people to take part, and which I'll tell you after if you're interested. By the time we finished, the fall of the Soviet Union seemed rather irrelevant because by then, the end of 2011, contemporary Russian politics were beginning to sound -- to be much more interesting.

We finished -- we actually really finished at the end of an era. We finished when poor Medvedev had to get up and announce that Putin was the candidate. And our last line of commentary was, there's no doubt that Putin will be President until 2026. So we finished the programs, we sent them off to the BBC, and then Putin went to

the martial arts match and got booed, and then there were the demos. So we had to -- our Christmas was ruined. We had to get the programs back and do something about the demos, so -- as you'll see.

So there are four episodes. This is the first one, which is called *Taking Control*. The second one deals mainly with the Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution. The third one, which is at Carnegie on Monday, is the war in Georgia and also Putin's reaction to Bush's missile defense policy. And the fourth one, which is called *New Start* -- I'm quite proud of that title -- which is about the New START Treaty and the recess and the two relationships: Medvedev and Obama, and Medvedev and Putin. But to see 2 and 4 you'll have to buy the DVDs.

So, we chose these two because the shorter National Geographic version didn't do much of this first program or the third program, and we thought that's what you people who are really interested in Russia would like to see.

MS. HILL: Okay.

MS. PERCY: So, enjoy, I hope.

MS. HILL: That's great. And we'll get on with the showing, to leave us just a short time so you can ask some questions of Norma and David. We hope that everyone will be able to see okay at the back. We're just going to bring the screen down here, and obviously we're not going to sit in the way. So, we'll do a quick run to the front and then we'll join you again at the end.

(Film shown, 0:09:42 - 1:09:09)

MS. HILL: Well, that was all very dramatic. And of course, that was only the first episode, so there are more to see from this.

There were a couple of things that we should have mentioned at the very beginning, and I'm going to ask Norma and David to comment on some of this. First of

all, there's a book that actually accompanies the series that Angus Roxburgh of the producers worked on. It's called *Strongman* and some of you will no doubt have seen this. I think it was actually reviewed quite recently in either *The Post* or *The Times* and it basically runs through all of the various episodes and is an accompaniment to the series.

The other thing is that the series -- very interesting -- was recently shown on Russian television. There's a lot of strange echoes in this episode that I don't know whether some of you will have seen, but at the very beginning of the documentary when you're showing Mr. Gusinsky, the then-mogul of NTV -- in fact, it was NTV no longer owned by Mr. Gusinsky that showed the documentaries, I believe, and some of the other programs. So that was very interesting, and actually it was very well-received, as Norma and David can tell you.

Some of the reactions that I saw about the showing in Russia were very interesting because for the first time in years, people saw some people that they hadn't seen on the screens in Russia for a very long time, Mr. Khodorkovsky being the most obvious of this. And also, people have probably forgotten some of the details of the Khodorkovsky incident, which really was a turning point. But a lot of Russians hadn't seen Khodorkovsky on their screens, apart from during his lengthy trial and frequent appeals, and were really quite stunned by seeing him again in these early episodes.

Another person who you've interviewed at great length was Kasyanov, the prime minister, who is now actually in the opposition to Putin. In fact, that was the rift with Putin and the government, was over Mr. Khodorkovsky. I was quite amazed there about how candid Kasyanov. There was a very important quote for any of you in the audience for any of you who really follow Mr. Putin, when Kasyanov said that Putin knew more about oil and Rosneft and the energy sector than he himself did and it was his job. And that, of course, is the greatest association that people have with Mr. Putin, is how

much he's really well briefed and knows inside and out the Russian energy sector.

Another couple of things for Washington-watchers. Andrei Illarionov we now see at Cato Institute and often frequently here at Brookings. So, very nice to see Andrei in his original role as Mr. Putin's advisor.

Some of you might have also seen a glimpse of Jim Collins just behind Steve Hadley when he was coming out of one of the buildings in Moscow. Of course, our colleague next door running the Russia Center at Carnegie. So, there were a few people.

And there was one person that I think was a real coup for you to have, who was the Kremlin's foreign policy advisor, Sergei Prikhodko. And for any of you who are Russia-watchers, that was actually the first time I've seen Mr. Prikhodko speak at any great length. And I was really quite impressed that you managed to get Mr. Prikhodko to -- most Russians probably have no clue who he is. He is really a very senior figure in the Kremlin, has been there all the way through the Yeltsin period. He was actually hired by Mr. Putin and various people during the different times -- Volodin, the chief of staff who people saw in the background here -- and he's still there, so he's one of the great lasting figures in Russian foreign policy.

So, you really have an amazingly -- as you said, you tried to get into the inner sanctums to get some of the people who were really there on the ground and making all the decisions. Of course there's that wonderful moment -- somewhat implausible, it seems -- of Sergei Ivanov and Condoleezza Rice sneaking out with no one looking to go to the ballet. But, well, I guess you have to believe it.

Anyway, if there's anything else that, Dave and Norma, you would like to say before we ask if anybody has any additional questions? I mean, I found the whole thing extraordinarily dramatic. I've only watched it on the little screen on my computer



before, so actually seeing it on the big screen was -- I really did like the way that you put things together. Very clever use of footage, and obviously the rest of the story folds out over the next four episodes.

Is there anything you'd like to pick up on?

MS. PERCY: I will tell you the story of it going out on Russian television, which completely amazed us. I mean, when we started NTV, which is the big commercial station, but it's owned by Gazprom, so it's hardly an independent commercial station -- they have the best newsreel footage, the best archive, and we tried very hard to get it from them -- but the chap who is in charge, who was actually a friend of Paul Mitchell's, the director, said tell me about this documentary. What's it about and who are you going to interview? You said Kasyanov? And I'm terribly sorry, but we have a policy that we don't sell any archive to foreign companies. They would have absolutely nothing to do with us.

And so Program 1, this one, went out on British television in the end of January, and we got a call from them saying we'd like to show it. We thought, oh, are they going to take it and they'll cut out Kasyanov and they'll make Putin look better? So we wrote into the contract that they absolutely had to show it as we made it. And Masha Slonim, our Russian producer, had to be the person who looked at the translation to make sure it was absolutely accurate. And they signed it, but somehow Masha was waiting for the scripts to come and they kept getting closer and closer. And they said, oh, it was a big rush because he said we've got to show it before the election, before the 4th of March, because they said, well, it's in the government's interest to make it look like there's real democracy in the country during the election. And so, showing something that might be critical of Putin will be very good for proving these are really free and fair elections and so we've got to show it. We've got to get it ready by the 4th of March,

which makes sense. I mean, that's why NTV was doing it.

But it was the eve of the first program, they showed it all over one weekend: two one night, two another night. They came and there were some funny omissions in the script. I mean, I'm sure it was the translator getting it wrong, but, for example, that rather brutal scene in Chechnya where the boy was pulled away and it was said that he was found shot in the back later, they forgot to translate that line. And so Masha pointed it out to them and we really expected that that would be that, because it was the next day. And you know, if they pulled it out, what could we have done?

The BBC Worldwide, who is in charge of the distribution, their lawyers stood by the fax machine as Masha watched the program on transmission, ready to start an injunction to stop them showing any more if they had taken out the line. And lo and behold, it was in. And so, they really did show all the programs word for word, just as we made them, on Russian television. It really was the first time people had seen these people for years.

But then, the 4th of March happened and I'll be surprised if it'll be repeated.

MS. HILL: But you never know.

MS. PERCY: Yeah.

MS. HILL: David, is there anything you'd like to say? Yeah, so if anybody has any questions or observations? Sir. We'll bring a mic down to you.

MS. PERCY: Say who you are?

MS. PERCY: And please, if you could just introduce yourselves.

MR. ODIE: My name is Anthony Ody. I'm a consultant on economic development. It's an obvious question. Who did you try to speak to who refused to speak to you?

MS. PERCY: Vladimir Putin. (Laughter) But we couldn't have done it. I mean, we spent a lot of time wooing Dmitry Peskov, his political advisor. Angus Roxburgh had worked for them and knew him. He obviously had stopped work and was working -- he wasn't a producer, he was a consultant.

MS. HILL: Consultant.

MS. PERCY: And his job was to write the book and we did the interviews, and we all worked together to do the interviews, then Angus took the transcripts and went away and wrote the book while we made the program. So it was two completely separate -- in fact, the only thing that crossed over is that Fiona helped us on the programs and read the book. But apart from that, I mean, they were separate exercises.

Anyway, we spent a long time, and everybody who was in it probably with the exception of Andrey Illarionov, who we filmed at Cato, but virtually all the Russians spoke to the Kremlin before they agreed to be in it. And some of them were harder to persuade than others. Prikhodko, I've been trying to get Prikhodko since I made *The Fall of Milosevic* about the Kosovo war, and Chirac told me that we absolutely must have Prikhodko, he was the key to the Russian policy in Kosovo. And he wouldn't have anything to do with us, even though Chirac's diplomatic advisor asked him. But he finally, almost at the end of the program, he did agree to be interviewed, I think because we got Jim Jones, Obama's national security advisor, and they liked each other, and he did it.

MR. ALTER: This is the only -- he does feature in this program because the interview with Putin from one of our earlier series.

MS. PERCY: Right, yeah. However, we did for the first anniversary of 9-11, we made a program called *Avenging Terror*, and that was in the rosy days of Sergei

Ivanov going to the ballet with Condi and Russia and America all being united against terrorism. And we got extraordinary access then, and we filmed that interview with Putin talking about 9-11. So it was, in fact, our interview. We did interview Putin, but after that we had to rely on archive film.

But the combination of Paul Mitchell's knowledge of what exists and our very good Russian film researcher, it seemed to me that we got some things of Putin, you know, actually real, like those two meetings with the oligarchs where you can see Putin in action. You really are behind closed doors while the decisions are being made and you can see it and you get a revealing a portrait of Putin as if we interviewed him ourselves.

I mean, I think in this program you do get a sense of Putin. Whether it's as good in the later programs, I'm not sure.

MS. HILL: You also had a lot of people talk to you behind the scenes. Many of the Kremlin advisors, they just didn't want to be necessarily filmed.

MS. PERCY: Like Voloshin, who was another person who continued on from Yeltsin.

MS. HILL: Apart from Mr. Prikhodko, who was the biggest surprise who agreed to talk to you? Because in your latest series you have a lot of people that we haven't seen yet, in the rest of the episodes.

MS. PERCY: Well, the most extraordinary person is in Program 2, which is President Kuchma of Ukraine, who spoke extremely frankly about how he and Putin worked together to try and fix the election in Ukraine that led to the Orange Revolution. I never thought we'd get him and I never thought he'd speak like that.

MS. HILL: Yes.

MS. ROSTOVA: Natalia Rostova, a Cato Institute fellow and journalist, media correspondent --

MS. HILL: Could you speak up just slightly?

MS. ROSTOVA: Natalia Rostova, Cato Institute fellow and media correspondent back in Moscow. I have a question about your role in the '80s. Have you had any ideas which you felt were changed while you were producing these films? Have you had any surprises? What was the most surprising for you while working?

MS. HILL: It's a very good question. I mean, does it turn out as you thought it would when you first set out? Because I certainly know that -- I mean, many of us here, none of us have made perhaps documentary films, but certainly when you start to write something, sometimes it doesn't quite end up where you think it's going to.

MS. PERCY: That's true, except that you have to realize that we television producers are blank slates when we start and we know very little. I mean, my last experience with -- serious experience with Russia ended in 1991 and it's -- well, actually, we had this little bit in 2002, but it was rather a different place and it was a learning curve from the whole time.

But things like that relationship between Condi Rice and Sergei Ivanov are a complete surprise. I have to tell you how we got that, because we had a very hard time in Russia. I mean, first of all, we always do research interviews off the record before we film, and Russian officials won't do it. I mean, they have no concept of off the record. They are speaking in public and everything has to be on film. So like the very first interview we did was -- at all -- was with Sergei Ivanov -- sorry, with Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister, because nobody in the Foreign Ministry would talk to us until the minister gave us the interview and that meant it was okay. And it's pretty scary interviewing the foreign minister -- he's a pretty scary person anyway -- without really proper research.

But then we met Sergei Ivanov, and he gave us an off-the-record interview and he told us many of those things that you saw there. And two weeks later

did the film and he told us the story of going to the ballet with Condi. And so, we hadn't met Condi yet and we went to California to see Condi and we told her the story of the ballet -- oh, sorry. Before that, we got the film. Our wonderful film researcher actually went to the ballet and they filmed it. That's the thing that makes me wonder about was it spontaneous, because how did they have a video camera to do it? But they said that one of their people was a video freak and he had one around and as soon as they appeared, they filmed it.

So we had the film and we saw that amazing pour-over shot looking bored to tears by it. So, we took it and we showed the film to Condi and, you know, that's why she said it. And I think we probably did her a good turn because it's in her memoirs now, which she had not started to write yet. So, I think we reminded what a good story it was.

But it shows that it's one of the good things about making programs, is that you do get access to this film and it gives you things that you can ask people about. But, I mean, Condi really, genuinely cared about her relationship with him, and that is surprising, an old KGB guy and somebody who is known to be a Soviet specialist.

MS. HILL: David, what about for you, I mean, in terms of the way that the narrative played out? I mean, is this how you kind of expect -- because obviously there's a lot that's happened in these first few years. We've got up to 2003, 2004 now through this first episode.

MR. ALTER: Well, I mean, I focused on -- the film I directed was Program 3, which was the film about the Russia-Georgia war --

MS. PERCY: Georgia --

MR. ALTER: -- and missile defense. So I guess for me it was much more about trying to understand the two completely opposing narratives of the same event and trying to discern what the true line was between them.

MS. PERCY: Well, I mean --

MR. ALTER: You've got to kind of work out whether we did it or not.

MS. HILL: Well, a lot of the Russian reactions seem to have thought you were pretty evenhanded. I mean, it's not just a black depiction of episodes. I mean, you obviously didn't pull any punches on -- particularly by the insertion, as you mentioned, of the young Chechen, which is pretty harrowing. But you also, you know, did make the point that, you know -- you made it very clear that you can see why Putin may not have been too thrilled about some of his interactions with the United States, for example, which you underscored quite clearly.

MS. PERCY: In fact, I mean, in one bit, Tony Blair didn't give us an interview. He's probably the Westerner, because he's the one who went from making friends with Putin from the beginning, and we had a bit from one of his aides in which he said that Tony Blair decided to cut him some slack on Chechnya in order to establish the relationship from the beginning, and the way that it was going on. And then actually, it happens after 9-11 with the Americans, too. Instead of attacking Putin for his policy on Chechnya, they saw it as the war on terror being similar to the Americans.

MS. HILL: Does anybody else have any other questions? Yes.

MS. ZENZ: Is there an official version -- sorry. Hi, I'm Kimberly Zenz. I research cyber crime in Russia for VeriSign. I was just wondering, is there any official versions available online in Russian?

MR. ALTER: In Russian?

MS. PERCY: Well, it's on YouTube. That has nothing to do with us, but they have seen it on YouTube. It was also reviewed on the Open Democracy website by Fyodor Lukianov, and I think a lot of people, you know, looked at it because of that. But it certainly had been widely seen in Russia even before it went out on NTV. I'm sure

people are watching it online in Russia.

MS. HILL: Well, if nobody else has any -- oh, sorry.

SPEAKER: If you wanted to obtain this to show it in a different venue, how would you go about it?

MS. PERCY: I think you'll ask us.

SPEAKER: I'm sorry?

MS. PERCY: Ask us. Send an e-mail to us at Brook Lapping.

SPEAKER: Okay, I'm --

MS. PERCY: At the moment it's not --

SPEAKER: I'm with a film program in Southern Florida, Santa Bella Island, and they often show documentaries like this, and it would be wonderful if we could get the information on how to obtain it.

MS. PERCY: National Geographic's 90-minute version is available from them and I don't know whether that's easier or not. It emphasizes more the Russia and the West bit and the American bits.

MS. HILL: So the National Geographic part of it cuts out a lot of this more specific --

MR. ALTER: Most of the domestic --

MS. HILL: Lot of domestic --

MR. ALTER: -- Russian story, yeah.

MS. PERCY: Like the tax. But it's a good 90-minute program, which David made.

MS. HILL: Were you able to have any say in the 90-minute version? You did.

MR. ALTER: We versioned it in collaboration with the execs at National



Geographic.

MS. HILL: So the next project that you're working on is on Iraq, and I was wondering if you were going to recycle some of the -- because it's a very creative use of a lot of the material that you have there that you've made and used in other films.

MR. ALTER: Well, I did actually last week have to do a teaser tape, what they call a teaser tape, for some potential funders and we did find ourselves going back to look through the rushes of those interviews to see if there was anything else. So yes, it is possible that that will fit into our storyline. But the series that we're doing now is not just about that story, which everyone's very familiar with, of the road to war, but really looking from 2000, 2001, all the way through to 2012, 2013. So we've got our work cut out for us.

MS. HILL: And how long does it typically take to make one of these documentaries? Because you started this one in 2009, and, as you said, you had to kind of city rush back after the protests to redo the beginning again.

MR. ALTER: It takes as much time as Norma can persuade broadcasters to let her have.

MS. PERCY: At the moment, the war in Iraq is a quickie for me because they wanted it to the 10th anniversary, which is next year. So I'm not quite sure how we're going to do it, but this time next year maybe you'll invite us to show that.

MS. HILL: Yes, well, our colleagues in the Saban Center might go and do the screening of Iraq.

Anyway, we'd like to thank you very much for coming. And if everybody would like to go on Monday to Carnegie, I think you can find on the Carnegie website to see the episode about the war in Georgia. But then there's still the other two episodes that we hope you will all be able to see.

Thank you, Norma and David, for coming and joining us. I really hope that everybody else will watch the rest of the documentary, which I can personally highly recommend. So, thank you.

MS. PERCY: Thank you for laughing in all the right places.

MS. HILL: Thank you, that was good. Thank you. (Applause)

\* \* \* \* \*

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