

A PATRIOTIC (OTECHESTVENNAYA) WAR AGAINST CORRUPTION

IN THE MEMORY OF ANDREI SAKHAROV

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ABSTRACT: The organizers of the Andrei Sakharov "Alarm and Hope 2011" conference have asked for a "good theory" combating civic apathy in Russia in the spirit of Andrei Sakharov's work and example. This paper proposes a Patriotic Campaign Against Corruption as the antidote and observes that such a campaign is a precondition to achieving Andrei Sakharov's goals. Moreover, his work and example could be useful in catalyzing a Coordinating Council of diverse groups participating in such a campaign.

THE THEORY WE PROPOSE: COMBATING APATHY WITH A CAMPAIGN AGAINST CORRUPTION

First of all, the way to defeat public apathy is to recruit citizens into a campaign which they consider useful, practical, and important. A campaign attacking all forms of corruption in Russia--police corruption, corporate and commercial corruption, political corruption, judicial corruption, and so on--would have these characteristics. Such a campaign attacks behavior that Russians observe in their daily lives; they detest it and would welcome ways to reverse it.

Second, such a campaign would be in the spirit of Andrei Sakharov because his goals of good governance, arms limitation, improvement in human rights, and strengthening environmental protection cannot be achieved without controlling corruption and because the struggle against corruption requires the kind of principled and courageous leadership he exemplified.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY MAKES SUCH A CAMPAIGN FEASIBLE

Such a 21st century campaign is feasible because modern means of communication involving the internet permit the public to report corruption and to share complaints about corruption. Such a campaign should be, to an increasing extent, politically acceptable because without such a campaign, the economic future of Russia cannot be assured.

A campaign against corruption should be broad-based, involving diverse groups using a variety of methods. It should apply the principle that "Sunshine is the best disinfectant." It would publicize corruption by identifying it in particular cases. The campaign would work through relevant conferences and suitable websites, and it would disseminate information about the newest tools for fighting corruption. It would organize demonstrations, lobby public officials, support victims of corruption, complain about specific corrupt officials, and, above all, defend and protect those who are active in the

campaign from retaliation by corrupt forces. In this connection, the protection of courageous and ingenious campaigners against corruption like Alexei Navalny is of the utmost importance. Like Andrei Sakharov, he is standing up and providing a critical example!

This campaign can be based on powerful Russian trends. Revulsion against corruption is rising. Russia has a growing middle class whose mentality is increasingly free of Soviet-era restraints and hence is more willing to participate. Meanwhile, citizen access to the internet is growing rapidly. And new internet-related techniques for exposing corruption are being created and used in different parts of the world.

A Russian campaign against corruption would be considered patriotic. All right-thinking Russian citizens and organizations could join to strengthen Russia's economy and society as well as Russia's standing in the world. Indeed, fighting corruption is a way of binding people together to fight for the other related issues of social justice and disarmament, so desired by Academician Sakharov. Finally, such a campaign can eventually win support from Government officials who, in principle at least, are against corruption.

True, this will have to be a long-run campaign. The current trends are adverse. Russia is currently sinking ever further into corrupt practices. Scholarly articles now call Russia a "criminalized state" in which corruption is diffuse. Three factors causing this are the inheritance of Soviet corruption, the trauma of transition from socialism capitalism, and the recent drift into authoritarian government. Reversing these trends will not be easy. But Andrei Sakharov fought successfully, by himself, against even greater odds, and a number of other trends will support the campaign.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

I. IS THIS CAMPAIGN REALLY THE BEST ALTERNATIVE FOR COMBATING PUBLIC APATHY IN PURSUIT OF ANDREI'S SAKHAROV'S GOALS? Russian citizens will be much more easily persuaded to join a campaign against corruption than to support a campaign for human rights, democracy, or the environment because many Russian citizens do not care about these issues.

But they suffer from corruption constantly. When patriotic Russians are told that their country, formerly a superpower, is now 145th in a list of 178 countries ranked by increasing level of corruption--almost at the bottom of the list--they must be shocked and disturbed. And learning that this corruption is lowering their standard of living must be devastating.

Russia has received a downward trend arrow for electoral abuses, declines in religious freedom, greater state control over the presentation of history, growing police corruption, and the repeated use of political terror against victims, including human rights activists and journalists. Russia is now rated on the same level as Haiti and Tajikistan in an annual corruption index. Russia now has the most corrupt economy in that Group of 20 (G-20) nations that includes the largest economies in the world. It is listed as the most corrupt country in Europe.

II. IS THIS CAMPAIGN ESSENTIAL TO ACHIEVE SAKHAROV'S GOALS? Fair elections require cleaning up political corruption. Human rights goals require cleaning up judicial and police corruption. And protecting the environment requires preventing greedy corporations and individuals from selling out environmental interests for financial side-payments. So the control of corruption is essential to Sakharov's goals.

III. HOW FEASIBLE IS A CAMPAIGN OF THIS KIND? The modern internet world permits Russian citizens to leak examples of corruption to websites, like Wikileaks, based on foreign or domestic servers. These operations can publicize and distribute truths anonymously that citizens would, otherwise, have feared to relate. Cell-phone cameras and microphones can record instances of corruption that can be disseminated over websites like YouTube. Websites like Facebook and Twitter are being used in related campaigns in the Middle East to spread information, including photographs, and to coordinate demonstrations.

In the long run, corruption will be harder to hide as transparency increases. It is less easy than it once was to hide the transfer of large sums of money; for example, Swiss banking laws are not as friendly to corruption as they used to be.

IV. ARE ENOUGH CITIZENS CONNECTED TO THE INTERNET? Use of the internet in Russia is increasing rapidly. By 2010, in Russia out of a total population of 140 million,, there were 43.3 million internet users, with 30 million using it daily. Every fourth family in Russia will soon have broadband internet. The internet audience is thought to be growing rapidly--perhaps even by 30% in the last year. Thus, a campaign against corruption based on the internet will eventually reach a high proportion of the young, who will, in turn, help the rest of the country join in particular campaigns. By 2040, every working person in Russia under age 65 will have spent their working life after the fall of communism and will benefit from the new attitudes toward initiative, enterprise, and efficiency. Rapid changes in the social and political consciousness of young people are quite possible--as we have seen in the Middle East.

V: CAN SUCH AN INTERNET CAMPAIGN BE DISRUPTED? Access to the internet in Russia is still largely unhindered. True, Russia's level of internet freedom has deteriorated and is now listed in surveys as "partly free," as opposed to "free" or "not free." And many Russian bloggers have come under attack – both online and in person. According to Freedom House, out of 37 countries, with the most free in 1st place and least free in last, Russia was recently ranked in 22nd place, below Venezuela and above Egypt and Zimbabwe, by measures such as obstacles to access, limits on content, and violations of user rights.

But sustained future disruption of an internet-based campaign against corruption might require interference with the modernization of the Russian Federation. The informational and efficiency benefits of the internet are absolutely essential to the progress of a modern state. Further the internet is very flexible. For this reason, in the long run, anti-corruption campaigns through the internet are likely to resist technological disruption.

VI. DOES THE ECONOMIC SUCCESS OF RUSSIA REQUIRE THIS CAMPAIGN? Corruption is a heavy tax on Russian economic efficiency and economic progress. With the current degree of corruption, the economic future of Russia will always be based on high energy prices, which may not stay high forever.

And even if they do, unless corruption is suppressed, Russia's economic future will be based on selling its resources to economically stronger neighbors--China to the south and Europe to the west. Is this a proper future for the great state of Russia?

SOME CURRENT REALITIES

Corruption has been a special preoccupation of the Russian Government for the last eight years, with Mr. Putin, first as President and then as Premier, saying that corruption was "unacceptably" high and that reducing it was a priority for his government. But the Government effort has been largely a paper campaign highlighted by punishing some specific criminals. According to a 2010 survey done by the Ministry of Justice, the fight against corruption has not reduced the number of bribe-takers.

Very recently, President Medvedev has said that corruption has the economy "by the throat." He admitted that little progress has been made. He has declared the fight against corruption to be one of his priorities. A number of ministries are developing anti-corruption programs. Premier Putin has backed the idea of instituting tight controls over the income and property of law enforcement officials and judges, as well as of their family members.

Partly as a run-up to the next election, there is more talk from the leadership about corruption, and the Russian press last month said a campaign against corruption is, I read, expected.

But this government activity is not just responding to the upcoming election. It is responding, also, to the beginnings of a popular uprising. Just last month, 50,000 demonstrators from a pro-Kremlin group, the Nashi youth movement, and about 1,500 people from the Russian opposition People's Freedom Party, protested against corruption in separate Moscow rallies. The Nashi group announced the launch of an online campaign where videos, stories, and questions could be posted. They demonstrated on Andrei Sakharov Street. Russia's Public Chamber is planning a corruption hotline with an associated website as a clearing house for citizen's complaints and reports of suspicious activity on the part of state and government officials.

And the Government is also responding to political parties who, in the past, have made opposition to corruption part of their program: the Yabloko political party, the Union of Right-Wing Forces, and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Based on all this, it seems that Russia needs a comprehensive and diverse grass-roots anti-corruption campaign to save itself from drowning in corruption. The government needs grassroots help to succeed in controlling corruption.

I was in the Kremlin, a quarter of a century ago, attending a conference. I was standing next to President Gorbachev and Academician Sakharov when they first met. Gorbachev had just released Sakharov from Gorky. Sakharov spoke first and said politely: "It is nice to have freedom and responsibility again."

Without any hesitation, President Gorbachev smiled and said: "It is good that you recognize that with freedom goes responsibility." He was joking that Sakharov might in the future say something that would set all Russian aflame.

No doubt parts of the Government may fear that a broad-based public campaign against corruption might get out of hand. They may fear that it could be used by "foreign forces" to create some kind of "color revolution" in Russia or that it might unify domestic opposition to the Government. But opposing corruption is too legitimate a topic to be suppressed.

A COORDINATING COUNCIL FOR THE CAMPAIGN

An effective campaign against corruption should permit high degrees of freedom of operation by diverse groups all over the country. The campaign could not be controlled from a center any more than the Russian economy was able to be effectively controlled by central planning in the Soviet past.

The beginnings of a diverse public campaign against corruption are apparent. Members of the audience, in particular, and of Russian civil society, in general, will know best what they want to do to help this campaign proceed. But perhaps it needs a coordinating council that would bring together representatives from all those elements in the society who are sincerely against corruption to share their experiences and ideas and to help one another. Perhaps Andrei Sakharov's name and example could provide a banner under which this coordination could take place. Perhaps this conference could set such an organization in motion.

Jeremy J. Stone began visiting Russia in 1966 and is sometimes considered in Russia as the father of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (1972-2001), which was the most important arms control agreement of the forty-year Cold War. His wife, the mathematician B.J. Stone, learned some Russian to help him, in 1966-1970, urge the Russian Government to agree to the treaty. His memoirs at www.catalyticdiplomacy.org show that from 1963 to 2006, he presented a number of ideas designed to advance peace and disarmament and to avoid nuclear war to the Brezhnev, Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin Administrations. In 2006, at an early meeting of the Public Chamber, he gave a speech to its governing council urging U.S.-Russian cooperation in the promotion of good governance everywhere