Mr. Speaker, last

month, The Economist exhorted Western

leaders to more openly and consistently

criticize Russia for its sham democracy,

its brutal treatment of

human rights activists and political

dissidents, and its utter disregard for

the rule of law. It was a challenge that

should be taken seriously.

Our approach to Russia has been

characterized paradoxically by a failure

to be both sufficiently pragmatic

and sufficiently idealistic at the same

time. Russia is a key international

player with whom we must engage.

That’s undeniable. It is a permanent

member of the Security Council. It is a

key actor in any international effort to

contain Iran’s nuclear ambitions. It exerts

great influence in regions such as

central Asia, with implications for our

struggle against violent extremists in

Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Keeping our engagement with Russia

as constructive and effective as possible

is essential to pursuing our vital

national security interests. But, Mr.

Speaker, this reality cannot preclude

our commitment to promote democracy

around the globe and condemn

those who brutally suppress it. We

must stand up for human rights and

the rule of law, even when—especially

when—they are undermined by major

international players. We cannot remain

silent when journalists and activists

are killed or savagely beaten with

impunity, while political prisoners face

years of jail time.

The new guilty verdict imposed on

Mikhail Khodorkovsky late last year

makes it appear that the only crime

that’s actually punishable in the Russian

Federation is opposition to Putin.

Days after the verdict was handed

down, opposition leader and former

Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov was arrested

for participating in a peaceful

rally. He had committed the grave offense

of expressing support for the protection

of constitutional rights and

condemning the sham Khodorkovsky

verdict.

Hostility to the rule of law extends

beyond Russia’s own borders, as we saw

in the August 2008 invasion of our

democratic ally Georgia. It was reprehensible.

Georgia’s sovereignty and

territorial integrity remain under

threat today.

In our relationship with Moscow, we

must learn to balance the twin imperatives

of effective engagement and criticism

of gross miscarriages of justice.

This will only become more essential

in the context of the coming debate on

Russia’s entry into the World Trade

Organization. Russia has moved closer

than ever to acceding to the WTO. We

are likely to face this prospect in the

coming year and the resulting vote on

whether to extend Permanent Normal

Trade Relations.

We will need to have a full and robust

debate on this issue. We will need to

ensure that PNTR is not granted until

we have confirmed that Russia has fulfilled

the basic obligations that WTO

membership demands. If those obligations

are met, my view is the WTO accession

would be a very positive step

forward. Bringing Russia into a rulesbased

trading system would bind Moscow

to the rule of law. It would create

consequences and enforcement mechanisms

for failure to live by its commitments.

WTO membership is by no means a

panacea, particularly for symptoms as

deeply flawed as Russia’s, but it would

be a significant step in the right direction.

Not only would it impose the rule

of law in Russia’s trading relationships,

it would demonstrate that even

Moscow recognizes the value of international

rules of fairness. This should

serve as a reminder that their presumed

indifference to our criticism is

no excuse for failing to voice that criticism.

We need to engage with Russia, but

Russia also needs to engage with us.

We cannot shy away from taking a

public stand against increasingly brutal

repression at the hands of those

with whom we have important negotiations.

Neither can we lose sight of the

fact that supporting the rule of law is

not just about promoting American

ideals.

b 1850

One of the most important lessons of

the last decade is that democracy

strengthening is as firmly grounded in

realpolitik as it is steeped in lofty,

high-minded ideals. If our moral clarity

helps to strengthen democracy advocates

in Russia, we will further our

strategic goals in the long run. A less

corrupt, less autocratic regime in Moscow

will result in a better international

partner.

As Vladimir Kara-Murza has written

in World Affairs, defending the rule of

law is not just our right but our duty.

Last week, Vladimir wrote that statutes

of the Organization for Security

and Cooperation in Europe, to which

both the U.S. and Russia are party,

make this clear. The statutes state,

It is absolutely imperative, Mr.

Speaker, that we do absolutely everything

that we can to strengthen this

relationship but pursue the rule of law.