Mr. President, I rise

today, regretfully, to discuss the faltering

state of democracy in Russia. I

say ‘‘regretfully,’’ because during my

more than 31 years in the U.S. Senate,

I have consistently striven to improve

relations between our country and Russia.

For example, a few years ago, despite

severe U.S. budgetary constraints and

significant foreign policy differences

with Moscow, I introduced legislation

that when enacted substantially increased

funding for Muskie Fellowships

for graduate students from Russia.

During my time in the Senate—

which has spanned the last decade of

Brezhnev, the brief ruling periods of

Andropov and Chernenko in the early

1980s, the lengthier and stormy tenures

of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, and since

2000 the era of Vladimir Putin—I have

always believed that a constructive relationship

with Russia is in the best interest

of that great country, and is a

vital national interest of the United

States.

During the Soviet period our ties

were based overwhelmingly on strategic

considerations. Moscow and

Washington had huge, redundant nuclear

arsenals that, if ever used, would

have ‘‘made the rubble bounce’’—that

is, would have gone a long way toward

destroying life on this earth as we

know it.

The focus of our diplomacy, particularly

of our arms control negotiations,

was to make that ultimate horror scenario

impossible.

But we had no illusions about making

the Soviet Union a genuine partner

in anything more than in that narrow

strategic sense. Whether or not one

fully concurred with President Reagan’s

memorable description of the

U.S.S.R. as an ‘‘evil empire,’’ no one

could have asserted that it in any way

resembled a democracy, anchored by

the rule of law, with civil liberties and

human rights for all its citizens.

In fact, after the signing of the Helsinki

Final Act in 1975, the United

States effectively utilized the so-called

‘‘Basket Three’’ of that document to

publicly hold the Soviet Union accountable

for its violations of human

rights and civil liberties.

Great hopes for change accompanied

the collapse of the Soviet Union at the

end of 1991 and Boris Yeltsin’s successor

government in the Russian Federation.

Although the lid did come off

of the worst of state repression,

Yeltsin’s tenure was marred by widespread

corruption, which discredited

democratic reform in the eyes of many

Russians.

Yet Yeltsin, for all his failings, did

successfully make the difficult personal

transition from communist to

democrat. Given time, Russia’s political

system held—and still holds—the

promise of evolving into a genuine democracy.

That potential, unfortunately, has

not only not been utilized, it has been

systematically stifled by Yeltsin’s

hand-picked successor, Vladimir Putin.

In his 41⁄2 years in power, Mr. Putin,

an intelligent and street-smart former

agent of the KGB, has developed a system

known as ‘‘managed democracy.’’

Aside from the unintended irony of this

oxymoronic construct, in practice it is

long on ‘‘managed’’ and short on ‘‘democracy.’’

In essence, Russians are

witnessing a rollback of the civil liberties

they enjoyed during the 1990s.

Both the 2003 parliamentary elections

and the March 2004 presidential

election were described as seriously

flawed by international observers.

The Putin government has selectively

and ruthlessly utilized its prosecutorial

powers to silence incipient rivals

and thereby intimidate other potential

opponents. The most celebrated

case is that of Mikhail Khodorkovsky,

former head of Yukos Oil, Russia’s

most modern, Western-like private

company. Mr. Khodorkovsky’s principal

sin appears to have been his belief

that a wealthy man had the right to

engage in Russian political life as a potential

alternative to Putin by funding

independent, non-governmental organizations.

The imprisonment and legal proceedings

against Khodorkovsky have

violated virtually every canon of fairness

and legality. His trial on tax evasion

charges, which opened on Wednesday

in Moscow, was scheduled to be

held in a cramped courtroom in a blatant

move to restrict access to outside

observers.

In a speech late in May, President

Putin delivered an ominous warning to

Russian organizations that defend democracy

and human rights for allegedly

serving ‘‘dubious’’ interests and

receiving financial support from the

West.

Putin has also used financial gimmicks

to eliminate the major, independent

national television stations in

Russia, leaving only a handful with

local audiences. Earlier this month the

most popular and outspoken surviving

Russian television journalist was fired.

As a result of this repressive media

policy, Russian viewers have long since

been denied objective coverage of world

events, especially of the brutal war

being waged by their army in

Chechnya.

In that context, President Bush’s answer

last week to a question at a G–8

press conference in Sea Island, GA, is

disturbing. The President said that the

G–8 leaders were ‘‘united by common

values.’’ He went on to explain: ‘‘We do

agree on a free press. We don’t necessarily

agree with everything the free

press writes, but we agree on a free

press.’’

The ancient Greeks used irony as a

rhetorical device by attributing a positive

characteristic to negative reality.

The Black Sea was called ‘‘the peaceful

sea’’ precisely because, in actuality, it

was so stormy. We moderns might call

it ‘‘the power of wishful thinking.’’

I hope that is what President Bush

was doing—subtly pushing Putin into

behaving like a member of the G–8

club, to which Russia now belongs despite

its mid-size economy, which, absent

extraneous political criteria,

would not qualify it for membership.

For although the Russian newspaper

scene is still vibrant, as I have just described,

its electronic media are anything

but free. And, as in the majority

of other countries, most citizens of the

Russian Federation get their news

from television, not from newspapers.

Some observers fear a crackdown on

the print medium and perhaps even on

foreign broadcaster journalists based in

Russia.

As for supposed overall ‘‘common

values,’’ the most recent report on

Russia in ‘‘Nations in Transit 2004,’’

published by Freedom House, shows

Russia slipping from poor to very poor

during calendar year 2003 in 5 of 6 categories:

electoral process; civil society;

independent media; governance; and

constitutional, legislative, and judicial

framework. The only category in which

it did not fall was corruption, and

there it remained mired at an extremely

poor level.

I hope, therefore, that Putin will not

misconstrue President Bush’s off-thecuff

answer in Sea Island as license to

continue his own undemocratic domestic

policies.

As several American commentators

and newspaper editorials have discussed,

Russia’s inclusion in the G–8

since the late 1990s is not irreversible.

Its economy certainly does not qualify

it for membership, and if it persists in

violating the ‘‘common values’’ to

which it pays lip service, the United

States and its democratic allies may

decide to return to the G–7 format.

I hope it does not come to that.

I thank the Chair and yield the floor.