

NWX-WOODROW WILSON CENTER (US)

Moderator: Drew Sample
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Coordinator: Excuse me. I'd like to inform participants that the conference is now being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. If you need any assistance throughout your call, please press star 0. Thank you.

You may begin.

Drew Sample: Well, good morning everyone and good evening to those of you who may be in Moscow joining us. This is Drew Sample from the Woodrow Wilson Center. I want to thank everyone for joining us for this media conference call on the Moscow mayoral elections that just happened yesterday.

I think that there was some surprising, to some, results from the election that we're all looking forward to talking about. And, we're also looking forward to Navalny's reactions from on the ground in Moscow.

On the call again, we have Nikolai Petrov, in Moscow and Matthew Rojansky and (Will Pomeranz) here in Washington, D.C. We're all here to answer your questions. But, I think, first we'll start with some brief introductions.

Nikolai, if you can go ahead and introduce yourself, and then maybe give us a sense of sort of the immediate reactions, and how things are going in Moscow that would be great.

Nikolai Petrov: Okay, I'm Nikolai Petrov. I worked for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for almost 15 years covering the elections and domestic politics in general. And now, I teach at Higher School of Economics. So, I would say that Navalny's resolved, and especially the fact that Moscow's incumbent Mayor Sobyenin didn't manage to win by a landslide came as a surprise.

And, there were a lot of stipulations about the new Kremlin's model of limited competition, waged (unintelligible) here in Moscow and (unintelligible) a little action and in a couple of other places.

In my view, there is no new model it's a kind of kind of adjustment to changing environment. In case of Moscow, it was needed for Sobyenin to be elected and to increase his legitimacy and the only way to do this was to have a kind of real competitors.

They didn't let Mikhail Prokhorov to be the candidate and Mikhail Prokhorov got 20% here in Moscow in last year's president election. And, I think that the major advantage of Navalny, the reason why he was pressured by the Kremlin to (unintelligible) Prokhorov was the fact that Prokhorov could be somehow supported by part of Moscow's elite, especially by remainder of the (unintelligible) team.

And, Navalny was considered to be a non-substantial candidate who should be not supported by political elite by all means. And, whose popularity at the

very beginning of the campaign was 4%. So, there wasn't any risk of second (unintelligible).

Unfortunately, this calculation was wrong, and Navalny did (unintelligible) very effective and very well planned campaign. Part of this campaign was the fact that Navalny has been detained in July in Kirov and he got five years in prison, and there was the risk for him not to participate in the race at all.

I should start with saying that they're also called municipal filters in regional elections in Russia, and they are much more tough in Moscow than in any other region, and it's important for any candidate to get registered without support from the party of power. So, the only way for Navalny to be registered was to get signatures of several thousand of municipal deputies, belonging to the United Russia and it was done by direct (unintelligible) order.

So, it was Sobyenin who did order municipal deputies to give their signatures in favor of Navalny to let Navalny to be registered and for him to participate in the ring, and this is how municipal filters are in regional elections.

So Navalny's campaign, especially after he was detained and he was freed (unintelligible) and there was huge number of volunteers, like say 15,000 volunteers who were eager to participate in Navalny campaign. The campaign itself was very effective.

Navalny did meet, well three times a day, in different parts of Moscow and he was very effective in communicating with ordinary Moscovites, not only these but here (unintelligible) several meetings with businessmen, including with IT businesses and he got public appeal by more than 100 small and medium size businessmen from IT business, while (unintelligible) for Navalny's support.

And, this is very new, because while the fact that businessmen who are facing understandable risk of (unintelligible) their relations with authorities, came public to support Navalny. So, there were a lot of observers in elections in Moscow, and it's needed to say that elections in Moscow has been very different from the rest of the country where elections were going on by almost the same model as usual.

In Moscow, it was different and partly it was due to the fact that Sobyenin, incumbent mayor, was sure that he could win, and psychological polls were giving him 60% to 65% of the vote and the same kinds of psychological polls were saying that turnout should be like say about 50/50 plus something percent.

It happened that turnout was much lower. It was like 33% and now experts are saying that Sobyenin's usual conformist electorate has been demobilized, while Navalny's electorate has been mobilized. And, that's why although the general turnout was not that high, the number of Navalny's supporters who changed the vote was big enough to give him very well, good results. Officially, it's higher than 27%.

But, the problem is, connected with Sobyenin's results. And, his result officially is 51.4%, which means that Sobyenin did win in the first round. The problem is that his margin is not that big to prevent him from being blamed for fraud. And for him, to feel safe and Navalny now is claiming that Sobyenin did not win, in the first round, and that's why the second round should take place.

I don't think that Navalny, who is, well organizing meeting in an hour from now on Bolotnaya Square, will be able to get mass support. But anyway, now

he is not eager to accept results of election. If to look at independent experts and observers, they will try to calculate results using different names, including those conversations where there was good observation and the general conclusion is that Sobyenin got something about 50% plus/minus 1%. Meaning, that nobody can say definitely whether Sobyenin got more than 50% and did win in the first round or not.

So, there are no serious reasons to question Sobyenin's victor in the first round. But, nevertheless, the general results can be seen as huge victory for Navalny who appeared as federal politician for (unintelligible) who did prove that not only they came prepared, but they can play their (unintelligible) and constructive role.

And, I think that - well the sort of development depends now from the Kremlin, whether the Kremlin will accept these results, and will decide that these steps in Moscow was more or less successful. And, the model can be used in many other early elections in regions or the Kremlin will try to - well make pressure on Navalny because it's still not decided whether he should - well, stay in prison.

He got five years in prison, and the most rational way, I think, for the Kremlin to behave now, is to change his term to five years on probation, which will not cause any political protest, but at the same time, it will not allow Navalny to participate in elections at least for a while in the future. But, nobody can be sure that these rational calculations will dominant and the Kremlin will make rational move.

Drew Sample: Okay, thanks Nikolai. I think Matt Rojansky or Will.

Matthew Rojansky: Well, why don't you go first?

(Will Pomeranz): Okay, well, I share a lot of Nikolai was saying. I tend to agree that 50% election results in Moscow really is not an overwhelming result. It really does show that there is a genuine opposition in Moscow. And, I share all the comments about, you know, about how this model of limited competition in many ways, did not work in Moscow, because it showed just how vulnerable potentially the technocratic leaders could be if face-to-face with a genuine opposition.

I just want to follow up on one thing about, with what Nikolai said and that is the strain that this puts on the Putin system. Again, I think it does call into question, this whole notion of limited competition. But, I think it also calls into question, the strategy of the Putin administration using the courts to discredit individual politicians.

Navalny ran for mayor after a conviction, much publicized and yet that did not seem to really stop his campaign. He was still able to garner a significant amount of votes. So, I think that looking forward, if indeed there may be arguments as to why they would suspend the five-year sentence.

But, on a certain level, if they want the Navalny problem to go away, the best way for it to go away is for him to go to prison, at least for a portion of his term. In light of the other kind of major political proceedings that have occurred in Russia, post December 2011, Bolotnaya, the Pussy Riot, there have been at those times questions about whether they should be suspended sentences.

In the Pussy Riot Case, they all received the two years as awarded by the court and in Bolotnaya those people who have gone through plea bargaining have gotten five years plus, and we don't know the results of the trial. So, I think

that this raises real questions about the notion of limited competition, but also the ability of the current administration to use the courts to undermine the opposition as well.

Matthew Rojansky: Okay, this is Matt Rojansky. I'll just add a couple of thoughts. I think the first, I just want to say that I appreciate very much (unintelligible) your perspective, it's incredibly helpful, my sense maybe not surprising to those that know my views is that I don't view this as any kind of defeat for the system.

I think that this is quite to the contrary, a demonstration of how the system, by use of kinds of tools, has been able to adjust. Sometimes that is courts and trials. Sometimes it is more direct application of a vertical authority. For example, removing the Mayor of (unintelligible) by force, other times it will be elections. So this is a system, which shows itself to be surprisingly, I think, flexible and adaptive, and resilient.

Which is precisely the concern that many critics have raised, in the last year and a half, when they saw a split emerging within the elite, was that - was the system too brittle and that any kind of split or any kind of pressure from below would bring the whole thing down? And, I think this is the beginning of an answer that says no it's not. If this system can survive, it has the ability to take advantage of different tools.

And, the second point that I want to make is, I think that this is not unfortunately, this doesn't change the crisis situation that's emerging with respect to the U.S./Russia relationship, and the degree to which Russian domestic politics have become, if not the single dominant issue that is poisoning that relationship, at least one of the major issues.

And, I want to say specifically that what the Russian system has been able to achieve over the last year and a half or two years, which is essentially remove any real practical impact of foreign funding, foreign expertise and even, you could say, kind of the foreign moral voice. You know, the kind of American or Western moral (unintelligible) moderate that would go with endorsement or non-endorsement of certain candidates.

I think that that has largely been swept from the table and that that to some degree benefits the system. There are ways in which that benefits non-systemic candidates as well, and I think Navalny positioned himself very wisely from the beginning, not to be in any way an ally of the West and thus he was less damaged by the removal of pro-western angios and pro-western funding and pro-western voices and the de-legitimization of those voices.

So, he was not hurt by it and I think we saw that in his relatively strong showing. But, the bottom line is, that this election will simply underscore for those who are convinced that Russia is an authoritarian state, in which elections are completely falsified and stolen, this election will underscore that perception.

For those who are convinced that Russia is something different. That it is sort of a semi-functional transitional state, perhaps of, you know, a Chinese model planned - semi-planned economy or directed economy this will confirm that result. And, for those who insist that Russia is in fact a democracy, but simply of a different type than those in the West. I think this will confirm that perception as well.

So, I think that this election, by and large has served the interest of the citizen.

Drew Sample: Great. Well thanks for the introductions, everyone and the comments there. I think we want to go ahead and go out questions. So, if anyone does have a question out there, please feel free to chime in now.

Rob Sachs: This is Rob Sachs from Voice of Russia, wanted to get your sense from the panel, whether or not this whole election - you know, how much it will prevent Navalny from going back to prison. Is this something that's going to make sure that now that he has all this popular support, there's no way he could be thrown back in jail.

Drew Sample: Nikolai, do you want to address that?

Nikolai Petrov: Yes, I'll try. It seems to me that it's much more complicated for the Kremlin now to put Navalny back to the prison, although, indication to do this did increase. And, what is important about Navalny and Moscow's reactions and there was a similar case in Yekaterinburg (unintelligible) region, where Roizman, the non-systemic opposition tended they did win in mayoral race.

I think that these two models make it dangerous for the Kremlin because they do show that (unintelligible) well, oppose publically authorities and these models will be attractive if only the Kremlin will let both Navalny and Roizman enjoy results of their victory. That's why I would say that in my view, the rational calculation will push the Kremlin in direction of (unintelligible).

At least now, waiting Navalny while here in Moscow to be free, but not to participate in active politics, and (unintelligible) when there will be less risk of large-scale political protest, which is inevitable now.

Imagine if the person who got almost 1/3 of votes in Moscow will be put into the jail immediately after getting support of more than 600,000 Moscovlites, will cause huge political protest. So, I would not expect the Kremlin to do this stupid mistake, although I cannot exclude such an opportunity.

(Will Pomeranz): Just to follow up on that one point. Even if Mr. Navalny is kind of given a suspended sentence, as Nikolai said, he can't run for office. He also is facing, at the present time, I believe at least three other criminal investigations. So, his ability to engage in politics will be sharply limited by the fact that he will be busy being a full time defendant, as well.

Drew Sample: And that was (Will Pomeranz) with those comments.

Matthew Rojansky: Can I make one more point here, this is something that has come up very frequently in a lot of transitional political situations, not only in Russia but in other former Soviet states and in transitional former communist states, in the previous decades. It's a question of does the success of an individual non-systemic insurgent candidate translate into the emergence of a national movement.

And, again, you may not be surprised. My answer here is probably not. Nikolai, I appreciate you brought up the example of Yevgeny Roizman in Yekaterinburg. This is a fantastic example, because this is a guy who I think any of us could imagine won by almost any number of means, so yes he was non-systemic in a sense in that he has been in conflict with officials at various times on and off for the last five years.

At the same time, is this a guy that you could imagine cut a deal? Absolutely, yes. Is this a guy that you would imagine standing up and taking on himself, the (unintelligible) of Navalny's movement, everyone is crooks and thieves,

throw them all in jail? Almost certainly not. So, this is why I say that this is a system, which has proven itself to be sensitive, adaptable that uses different tools at different times, in different ways.

Now, I'm not claiming everything is being orchestrated by some kind of grey eminence in the Kremlin, right. We know the grey eminence got canned anyway. But, what I am suggesting is that while we may see individual phenomena arise, which can indeed pose some challenges.

I think Nikolai, you said it right, it would be very complicated for the Kremlin to proceed with an imprisonment or further campaign against Navalny. It's definitely a complicating factor.

But, Navalny is not necessarily, now, one of the lead soldiers in a cohesive nationwide emerging opposition political force, which would then be a rival to power on a national scale. I still don't think that that's what we're looking at.

Drew Sample: (Alexei), did you have any questions?

Man: Yes, my question is, do you think that this competitive electorate politics are back in Moscow, because some say that Sobyenin, himself, was craving competition. That absolutely fending off legal challenges for Navalny (unintelligible) in the election in the first place. And, do you think that (unintelligible) has helped Navalny or was able to mobilize his (unintelligible).

Drew Sample: Can you repeat the last part?

Man: Do you think that (unintelligible).

Man: Low turnout.

Drew Sample: Nikolai?

Nikolai Petrov: Yes, I'll - I think that the most important (unintelligible) connected with the fact that we should have elections to Moscow City, Duma the next year. Meaning that their political machine, which has been constructed by Navalny. And which, did make it possible for him to get good results, it can be used almost immediately to prepare itself for the forthcoming elections to Moscow City, Duma, which is very important campaign of almost federal importance.

And, will help translate Navalny's personal victory into getting very good results and satisfaction in the parliament of Moscow at the capital of the country. And, I think that there is a real danger for the Kremlin, even if Navalny will be not allowed to participate personally in this race. Nothing can prevent him from having Navalny's block or Navalny's leave, which can count on getting very good results in forthcoming Moscow election.

That's why unlike in Yekaterinburg, where Roizman even is becoming (unintelligible) will face serious problems without any opportunity to keep his machine moving further. In Moscow, this is different and this makes the situation even more complicated for the Kremlin.

Man: I'm going to pop on the point about low turnout. I think it was a deliberate move on the part of the Kremlin or Sobyenin by deciding to have the elections so early in September, to kind of make sure that there was a low turnout. This is a typical time where people are still at their (unintelligible) residence, doing various types of harvesting and so forth.

It's not a time - August is not a time of focused political activity. So, I think, the low turnout in many ways is a response to the decision to hold the election in early September.

Nikolai Petrov: Could I please add just a couple of (unintelligible) on turnout. I think this is not - well it's extraordinary low turnout. And, usually in regional and municipal elections turnout is of similar - well, level and now in Moscow it was almost the same or even higher than in several other big cities.

Partly is due to the fact that the Kremlin did count on low turnout and low public activism. Not only, this is due to the fact that many Moscovlites, as well as other urban dwellers have been out of their cities, but is due to the fact that there wasn't very active campaign in the middle of summer. And, they don't know even have signs everywhere, like usually telling that you should go to Putin Station and so on.

So the calculation was that the basic part of voters (unintelligible), they should report the candidate of the party of power, and to (unintelligible) any more voters in order to avoid getting supporters of other candidates.

Drew Sample: I wanted to see if Lynn Berry, where you able to join us?

Lynn Berry: Yes, I'm here.

Drew Sample: Hi Lynn. Did you have a question for the group?

Lynn Berry: I guess we're all wondering where we go next. I mean, I think, one signal will be what Navalny does at the protest this evening, what he, you know, tells his supporters and what the mood is. But, I guess another question we're wondering and maybe the panel can address is, is what do we think the

chances are of some kind of a recount. Do we think anything's going to happen?

Drew Sample: Nikolai?

Nikolai Petrov: Well, in my view, elections are almost honestly reported. And, I don't think that there are real chances to, well, get any different results, even if counting ballots one more time.

The major point of Navalny and his headquarters is that many voters did vote at home. And, the problem with - and they are claiming to exclude their votes. The problem with that is you cannot exclude their -these ballots because they were put into one and the same box and the only way is to - a new result of the (unintelligible) voting, which is absolutely enforceable.

So, I don't think there are any chances to either correct the results of the election or to change results even at the lowest level.

(Will Pomeranz): And this is (Will Pomeranz), just thinking about next step forward, I agree with Nikolai that I don't think there's going to be a recount. Sobyenin will not be elected mayor. I think that two big variables or some of the variables going forward would be whether Navalny's loose organization actually stays together or whether it kinds of falls apart in the postelection environment.

And, I think the second question is whether Sobyenin reaches out to this part of electorate. I mean, he did try to during the campaign, and he's tried to be perceived as a very progressive, mayor who's reaching out to not only the working calls but kind of the intellectuals, and so forth in Moscow.

So I, think Sobyenin, really has an opportunity coming out of this election to see if he can begin to appeal to Navalny's electorate and if he does then I think his position would be enhanced. So, I think that's really kind of two of the things that I would be looking for coming out of the election.

Man:

It said on the rally tonight, I can't predict exactly what will happen or what the turnout will be. I always remember a line from a friend of mine, when I asked him back in late 2011, if he would visit any of these or participate in any of these rallies. He said, well, I have a lot of work to do and I have some shopping, but if I have time after that, yes, I'll definitely swing by. You know, sort of noncommittal.

And, I get the sense that as fired up as Navalny's electorate may be, that a lot of people who provided votes will nonetheless be somewhat more indifferent when it comes to their time, potentially risking, you know, physical wellbeing or being marked and put on lists, things like that.

That said if I were advising Navalny, what I would say right now is, you know, now is the time to be gracious in defeat and I say that with only a bit of a wink. What I mean is, now is the time to transition from being a bigger who is exclusively basically a threat to the system, the regime and to certain individuals who literally have said, these people are criminals, I will arrest them, I will put them in jail.

And, to transition into a figure who stands for a substantive policy agenda or in particular a management agenda, if you want to talk about city governance. You know, if you want to understand analytically why Sobyenin did well, other than being simply the lapdog of the Kremlin, he delivered.

You know, anyone who's been in Moscow over the last couple of years can tell you there's a lot of problems in Moscow. But, there other things that have been working really well and that have been surprisingly better since the departure of Luzhkov.

So, I think if Navalny can put forward some very specific ideas about what in fact, he would recommend doing differently. Or what, for example, candidates for the City Duma, who would align with him, could do differently, then I think that he puts Sobyenin in a position where Sobyenin has to embrace his electorate, and where the Kremlin, in fact, more broadly has to embrace the electorate that supports different policies.

But, if it's just about one group of guys that's going to convict another group of guys and arrest them, versus their rivals, that's not really a game that I think a lot of Russians are going to want to invest in.

Drew Sample: I wanted to see if (Cory Flintlock) was able to join us as well. Cory, are you there?

Nope, doesn't sound like it. All right, (Enid) did you have any, (Enid Dubinsky) did you have any questions for our experts here?

(Enid Dubinsky): I just wonder how election of Sobyenin and it looks like from realistic assessment, he will be the mayor, how will it affect the general atmosphere of like freedom of press in the city. I understand it will be in the context of the Russian government decisions, but nevertheless, mayor does have some say. You know, so that's my question basically.

Drew Sample: Nikolai do you have anything to respond?

Nikolai Petrov: Yes, I'm not waiting for any local changes. It seems to me that the most important correction is how will the Kremlin react on to Moscow as the (unintelligible), whether basic experiments will be considered to be successful or not. If it's not successful, then perhaps we'll see a much tougher approach and will absolutely for short will influence freedom of press and so on.

What is important, I think, it's the fact that in general neither Sobyenin nor Navalny are dreaming about the position of Mayor of Moscow, although, this is the third most important office in the country. I think that both guys are too ambitious to limit themselves by the mayoral office. And that's the problem. I think the general is speaking while it's possible to say that there are two campaigns in one. One was mayoral campaign and Sobyenin did clearly win this campaign.

The second was federal campaign and Navalny did win this federal campaign, showing that he's a federal level politician. And I think that what will follow depends more on the Kremlin's position, with regards to the general developments in the country, rather than any kinds of local politics and local problems.

(Enid Dubinsky): Thank you.

(Will Pomeranz): This is (Will Pomeranz), yes, I agree with those comments. And, really, kind of, if you're looking forward to the questions of freedom of the press, there are two real - two other issues that I think need to be consider. One, is to what extent does the Internet remain free in Russia. And, to what extent do various new laws that have been passed that potentially require service providers to remove information, to what extent those laws are going to be implemented.

And also, the decision to return slander laws to criminal offenses, and whether that is again used to (unintelligible) the press.

Drew Sample: Okay, do we have any final questions out there? I think we're - going to wrap things up pretty quickly, but we can take one more question.

Woman: Hello? Hello?

Drew Sample: Yes?

Natasha Mozgovaya: Hi, this is Natasha Mozgovaya with the Voice of America. I actually wanted to ask for your impression of how effective was their position, because I think Nikolai said that the complaint (unintelligible) Nationalist and then (unintelligible) and if I understand correctly, he wasn't allow to appear on Moscow channels. So, how - do you see any fault on the part of their position and the results? Could it be any different, if (unintelligible) maybe the turnout would be higher?

Drew Sample: (Unintelligible) (Will) has to leave us in a minute or two, so I want to give Will the first shot at that.

(Will Pomeranz): Well just in terms of the effectiveness of the opposition, obviously, it's as, Matt was saying, it's been very difficult for the opposition to unite around common issues. It's very difficult for them to really put forward alternative platforms when they don't have access to the traditional media, when they can't gain the same ability to mobilize the electorate as those who are in power.

So, I think in light of the obstacles that the opposition confronted, they did remarkably well. I don't think the people going into the election anticipated that Navalny would get upwards of 27% of the vote.

Obviously, the next steps for the opposition is very difficult, because it is a time to put forward constructive ideas, but I think the Kremlin has at various times tried to divide the opposition into the constructive opposition and the rest of the opposition.

And, in doing so, it marginalizes some people with genuine concerns and people who do want to participate in the system. So, I think in some that the opposition did as well as could have been expected, in light of the obstacles that were in front of it. We'll just have to wait to see whether these types of oppositions can actually form some sort of constructive base and engage full time politics.

Natasha Mozgovaya: Can I ask one more, please. Do you expect any reaction at all in Washington for these elections or (unintelligible).

Man: Well, I can try to field that. I'm sure that they'll be some kind of a limited statement if there has not been already out of the Embassy. I haven't seen it. Likewise, maybe something from State, but the bottom line is that the dynamic will absolutely continue. The United States has identified Russian domestic politics.

When I say the United States, I mean in particular, prominent members of Congress and even now, I think, you see the transition in the last month or two months, to the Obama administration, accepting this position, maybe not enthusiastically, but at least accepting it.

That Russian domestic politics is a big part of the problem, as opposed to the official policy just four years ago, where the reset was dual tracking, was we were going to work with the Russians on all kinds of issues. We're going to register our concerns about domestic politics and human rights and values, but we're nonetheless going to simply, you know, confine ourselves to a dialog with the opposition.

Now, it seems that the official position is these guys are bad guys. And, we have real problems with them, so (unintelligible) them and the domestic politics, problems and value problems certainly blend into foreign policy and national security around issues for example, like Syria, right.

The same guys who are denying their own people the ability to fully exercise their democratic rights, are selling weapons to and (unintelligible) dictators around the world. That's a narrative that has a tremendous amount of political currency in Washington now.

So, the relationships not going anywhere good, this election certainly doesn't help it. But, I also don't think that this is a watershed moment. I don't think you're going to see, you know, a major new initiative from the United States.

For example, to fund a Russian opposition, because, as I said before, the Kremlin and the system have been very effective in boxing out western support for politically active causes of every kind, whether it's the gay/lesbian issue, or it's more traditional politics or it's even transparency or good governance kind of activity.

And, that's why the results, as I think you noted in your previous question, that you have a guy like Navalny, who is considered an extremist by some. But, he would not be fully embraced, quite frankly, in a lot of western salon circles.

He would be seen as really quite a radical figure, maybe even a dangerous figure.

And yet, he is the torchbearer for transparency and clean good government in Russia. That is a result of this artificially constrained and sort of sterilized political environment that has been created.

Natasha Mozgovaya: Thank you.

Drew Sample: All right, do we have any final questions out there?

Man: This is Alexei speaking from the Russian (unintelligible) discussion, but as we were speaking, some important breaking news came about - regarding Russian proposals for Syria. Maybe, Dr. Rojansky would be able to comment, because Prime Minister (unintelligible) just demanded from the Syrian museum to hand over the chemical weapons under international control.

And so, my question would be whether this could have an impact on the discussion here (unintelligible) or whether the decision by President Obama to strike Syria is (unintelligible).

Man: Look, there has been, as far as I understand there hasn't been a decision to strike or how to strike yet, because I do think Obama is serious about getting congressional authorization. He's serious for his own political reasons, it's obvious, he doesn't want to be hanging out there alone on something that looks very similar to what his predecessor did on Iraq and weapons of mass destruction.

But, he's also serious, I think, because he believes that he does need to have a broader kind of dialog, a broader discussion and airing of the reasons why you do this and whether it will work.

So, there's no decision yet, but my interpretation, I just saw this headline, as well. I haven't read the details. My initial understanding of this Russian position is that it is consistent with the effort all along, which has been to come up with as many possible cooks, as many possible premises or pretexts, to delay a march to violence or a march to intervention by the west.

Putin's position, from the very beginning, has been that Russia mistakenly allowed the west to run the table on Libya in 2011 and that he will not be the leader on whose watch that will happen again, over Syria. And so, I think very smartly, not only is he saying he, you know, he would potentially consider a resolution, but it's going to have to be based on evidence that is convincing, it's going to have to be based on a (unintelligible) debate on Security Council and it would have to be under total control by the Security Council.

Now, he's adding one more condition, which is if you don't wait to see what the result of our request for Syria to give up its chemical weapons will be, well then, you're just like George W. Bush, you're rushing to war instead of being diplomatic and duly considerate of all the possible alternatives.

So, I think he's just complicating the pathway to the United States. I don't know that it changes the calculations fundamentally. I think if Obama comes away with fulsome support from the U.S. Congress and he has one or two important NATO allies behind him, and he has some regional support, he may do it anyway, because he believes that his credibility is on the line. I mean, he's created that situation for himself and the Russians won't change it.

Drew Sample: Well, thank you very much everyone for joining us. This call was recorded and we should have that audio available shortly and I can distribute it around for those who are only able to join us when we were part way into the call. We'll also have a transcript available about 24 hours from now, which I will also distribute everyone.

Thanks again to everyone for joining, and if you do have any follow-up questions, feel free to reach out to me directly and I can link you with any of our experts here on the call. Thanks a bunch.

END