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ACTION INR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	SMEC-00	INL-01	DODE-00
	DOEE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EUR-01	FBIE-00	UTED-00	VC-01
	H-01	TEDE-00	LAB-01	L-00	MCO-01	MOFM-04	MOF-03
	M-00	AC-01	DCP-01	NRRC-00	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01
	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SCT-00
	SP-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	SA-01	SNIS-00	NISC-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-01	DRL-02	G-00	FDIC-01	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	SWCI-00	/022W					

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9527
INFO MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
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SUBJECT: POLLSTERS ON PUTIN'S POPULARITY, ELECTION

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PLEASE TREAT ACCORDINGLY.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) ON MARCH 10 THE DCM HOSTED A LUNCH WITH PROMINENT RUSSIAN POLLSTERS TO DISCUSS THE NATURE OF THE RUSSIAN ELECTORATE TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE MARCH 26 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. ALL AGREED THAT PUTIN WOULD LIKELY WIN IN THE FIRST ROUND AND THAT VOTER TURNOUT WOULD NOT BE SO LOW AS TO INVALIDATE THE ELECTION. DISCUSSION OF THE REASONS FOR PUTIN'S POPULARITY CENTERED ON PUTIN'S ENERGETIC DEMEANOR AND FORCEFUL REACTION TO THE PROVOCATIONS IN DAGESTAN AND THE

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TERRORIST BOMBINGS. WHILE VOTERS SEEM LESS CONCERNED WITH THE QUESTION OF WHO PUTIN IS, THEY SEEM CONTENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT RUSSIA WILL HAVE A PRESIDENT WHO WILL BE ENGAGED. END SUMMARY

VOTERS KNOW PUTIN WILL WIN, BUT WILL THEY VOTE?

2. (SBU) ON MARCH 10, THE DCM HOSTED A LUNCHEON DISCUSSION WITH RUSSIAN POLLSTERS TO DISCUSS ISSUES RELATING TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. GUESTS INCLUDED

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. ALL POLLSTERS AGREED THAT THEIR COLLECTIVE RESULTS INDICATE VLADIMIR PUTIN WILL WIN THE MARCH 26 ELECTION, PROBABLY ON THE FIRST BALLOT. DEPENDING ON HOW POLLING QUESTIONS ARE PHRASED AND WHETHER RESULTS ARE FROM ONLY LIKELY VOTERS OR ALL RESPONDENTS POLLS PREDICT PUTIN WILL RECEIVE BETWEEN 46 AND 60 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, ZYUGANOV BETWEEN 18-20 PERCENT, AND YAVLINSKIY 4-8 PERCENT.

3. (SBU) IN DESCRIBING HOW STRONG PUTIN'S SUPPORT IS, [REDACTED] CITED POLLS SHOWING THAT PUTIN IS DRAWING SUPPORT FROM THE CONSTITUENCIES OF ALL PARTIES IN THE DUMA ELECTION. POLLS SHOW 22 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO VOTED FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN THE DUMA ELECTIONS WILL VOTE FOR PUTIN AND 66 PERCENT OF OVR VOTERS SYMPATHIZE WITH CANDIDATE PUTIN. [REDACTED] ALSO NOTED THAT PUTIN'S SUPPORT IS CONSISTENTLY HIGH AMONG ALL DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS WITH THE ONLY VARIATION BEING OLDER VOTERS WHO SUPPORT COMMUNIST CANDIDATES. [REDACTED] WHO PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED DOUBT THAT PUTIN WOULD WIN IN THE FIRST ROUND -- SAID THAT IT WAS "TOO BAD" THAT THERE WOULD LIKELY BE ONLY ONE ROUND BECAUSE IT WOULD DEVALUE THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

4. (SBU) SINCE MOST RUSSIANS BELIEVE THAT PUTIN WILL WIN (MORE THAN 70 PERCENT IN MOST POLLS), THE REAL QUESTION ON MOST MINDS, GIVEN HIS STRONG POPULARITY

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RATING AND THE SENSE OF INEVITABILITY, IS WHETHER ENOUGH VOTERS WILL SHOW UP TO GIVE HIM A FIRST ROUND VICTORY. AMONG THE POLLSTERS, THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT 60 OR MORE PERCENT OF THE POPULATION WOULD VOTE IN THE ELECTION.

[REDACTED] SAID HIS ORGANIZATION'S POLLS SHOW 65 PERCENT OF RUSSIANS ARE GOING TO VOTE. [REDACTED] NOTED THAT SOME POLLS SHOW AS HIGH AS 85 PERCENT PROSPECTIVE TURNOUT.

5. (SBU) [REDACTED] OBSERVED THAT IN [REDACTED] FOCUS GROUPS AND POLLS FOCUSING ON WHY PEOPLE VOTE, 56 PERCENT GAVE A REASON THEY WILL VOTE (SOCIAL OBLIGATION, ETC.). AS IS THE NORM IN RUSSIA, A HIGHER PERCENTAGE IS EXPECTED TO VOTE IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION THAN IN LAST DECEMBER'S DUMA ELECTION. AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE, HOWEVER, [REDACTED] SAID THERE WILL LIKELY BE A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF THOSE PROTESTING THE CHOICE OF CANDIDATES BY NOT VOTING AT ALL. ALL AGREED THAT THERE WAS A DIFFERENCE IN THE MOTIVATION OF VOTERS BETWEEN THE 1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND THE 2000 ELECTION. IN 1996, THERE WAS NO SYMPATHY FOR ANY CANDIDATE; ESSENTIALLY PEOPLE VOTED AGAINST ZYUGANOV OR AGAINST YELTSIN. IN 2000, VOTERS ARE GOING TO VOTE FOR A CANDIDATE -- THERE IS SOME ENTHUSIASM FOR PUTIN.

Q - WHY PUTIN? A - CHECHNYA

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6. (SBU) MUCH OF THE LUNCHTIME DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON THE NATURE OF THE ELECTORATE AND PUTIN'S POPULARITY.

[REDACTED] ARGUED THAT PUTIN'S POPULARITY WAS EXPLAINED ENTIRELY BY CHECHNYA. HE SAID PUTIN WAS THE RIGHT MAN AT THE RIGHT TIME, EXPLAINING THAT CIRCUMSTANCES PUT HIM IN A POSITION WHERE HE COULD DO THINGS THAT WOULD CREATE A STRONG IMAGE OF HIM AS A PERSON WHO WOULD ACT. [REDACTED] NOTED THAT FOR FIVE WEEKS AFTER HIS APPOINTMENT AS PRIME MINISTER, PUTIN HAD A JOB APPROVAL RATING OF AROUND TWO PERCENT. IT WASN'T UNTIL THE BOMBINGS IN MOSCOW AND OTHER CITIES THAT PUTIN HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW LEADERSHIP. (NOTE: PUTIN'S JOB APPROVAL RATING IS CURRENTLY AROUND 74 PERCENT. END NOTE)

7. (SBU) ALTHOUGH PUTIN'S POPULARITY SEEMED TO CATCH FIRE WITH HIS TOUGH CONDUCT OF THE CHECHNYA CAMPAIGN, NONE OF THESE POLLSTERS BELIEVED HIS RATING WOULD SUFFER NOTICEABLY BEFORE MARCH 26 IF THE CHECHNYA OPERATIONS STARTED TO GO BADLY FOR RUSSIA. THEY NOTED THAT WHILE SUPPORT FOR THE MILITARY OPERATION IN CHECHNYA WAS HIGH (60 OR MORE PERCENT IN MOST POLLS), ALMOST THE SAME PERCENTAGE BELIEVE THAT A PARTISAN WAR AND TERRORIST ACTS WILL CONTINUE. (COMMENT: ACCORDING TO ONE POLL, LESS THAN 20 PERCENT OF RUSSIANS BELIEVE THE CHECHEN OPERATION WILL END IN A QUICK AND COMPLETE VICTORY BY FEDERAL FORCES AND HALF DO NOT THINK IT WILL END SOON. RUSSIANS SIMPLY MAY EXPECT THAT SUCH AN OPERATION WILL HAVE HIGH COSTS AND THEREFORE THE

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CONTINUATION OF THE CONFLICT MAY NOT TURN IMMEDIATELY
INTO DECREASED SUPPORT FOR THE OPERATION OR FOR PUTIN.
END COMMENT)

8. (SBU) [REDACTED] AGREED THAT CHECHNYA CONTRIBUTED
TO PUTIN'S HIGH APPROVAL RATINGS, BUT ARGUED THAT SO
WOULD ANY ACTION OR EVENT THAT WOULD HAVE SHOWN PUTIN
TO BE A LEADER. ALL GENERALLY AGREED THAT IT WAS THE
CIRCUMSTANCES -- THE FACT THAT PUTIN WAS IN A POSITION
WHERE HE HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO ACT LIKE A LEADER -- THAT
MADE PUTIN THE RIGHT MAN AS OPPOSED TO ANYONE ELSE.
SIMILARLY, THEY AGREED THAT THE VITALITY OF THE ACTING
PRESIDENT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON FOR HIS
POSITIVE IMAGE. SEEING PUTIN ON TELEVISION, SPEAKING
DAILY, TALKING TOUGH ABOUT WHAT THE ADMINISTRATION
WOULD DO, SUPPORTING A STRONG ARMY, GAVE RUSSIANS AN
IMAGE OF PUTIN AS SOMEONE ON WHOM THEY COULD PIN THEIR
HOPES.

9. (SBU) [REDACTED] CREDITED THE PROFESSIONALISM OF
THE PUBLIC RELATIONS EXPERTS OF PUTIN'S CAMPAIGN STAFF
WITH CREATING AN IMAGE FOR PUTIN. THEY HAVE SHOWN HIM
AS A STRONG LEADER WHICH IS WHAT RUSSIANS WANT.

[REDACTED] POLLS SHOW 65 PERCENT WANT A STRONG PERSONALITY
AS HEAD OF THE COUNTRY. ALL POLLSTERS AGREED WITH THE
CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT VOTERS REALLY KNOW VERY LITTLE
ABOUT PUTIN, BUT THEY INTERPRETED THIS AS SIGNIFYING
THAT "WHO PUTIN IS" IS NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION
TO VOTERS. RATHER THE POLLSTERS BELIEVE THAT THE
VOTERS SEE IN HIM THEIR OWN HOPES AND PREFERENCES. AS

[REDACTED] COMMENTED FURTHER, RUSSIANS DO NOT WANT TO LOOK
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BACK, THEY WANT TO LOOK FORWARD -- THEY WANT TO SEE IN
PUTIN HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, A FUTURE GUIDED BY A STRONG
HAND.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE COMMUNISTS?

10. (SBU) WE ASKED WHETHER COMMUNIST VOTERS WILL
SIMPLY DIE OUT OR, ALTERNATIVELY, AS SOME ANALYSTS HAVE
SUGGESTED, THAT AS RUSSIANS AGE AND GO ON PENSIONS THEY
WILL TURN TO LEFTIST PARTIES. THOSE COMMENTING AGREED
THAT ECONOMIC INSECURITY WOULD DRIVE VOTERS TOWARD
LEFTIST PARTIES (BUT NOT NECESSARILY THE COMMUNIST

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PARTY). [] ARGUED THAT AS SOON AS PEOPLE REACH PENSION AGE (55 WOMEN/60 MEN) AND FEEL THE EFFECTS OF A SMALL INCOME, THEY WILL BEGIN TO WORRY ABOUT THEIR FUTURES EVEN THOUGH, IN MOST CASES, THEY WILL RELY ON MORE THAN THEIR PENSIONS FOR RETIREMENT INCOME.

11. (SBU) [] ARGUED THAT PEOPLE WILL BEGIN TO BECOME CONCERNED EARLIER, AS THE MIDDLE CLASS REACH 35 YEARS OR SO, AND THEY WILL BEGIN TO THINK OF THEIR CHILDREN'S FUTURE. [] OBSERVED THAT ECONOMIC ISSUES ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO VOTERS AND THAT THE CURRENT LOW INFLATION (AFTER THE ECONOMIC CRISIS) HAS HELPED PUTIN, BUT THAT SUCH POPULARITY WOULD BE HURT IF PRICES GO UP.

12. (SBU) IN DISCUSSING PUTIN'S ACTIONS AS ACTING

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PRESIDENT, [REDACTED] ARGUED THAT PUTIN HAD NOT TAKEN ANY STEPS (I.E., HAD NOT ADOPTED ANY CONCRETE POLICIES) AND THAT AN ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN WOULD BE THE MOST BENEFICIAL STEP HE COULD TAKE. [REDACTED] DISAGREED, ARGUING THAT PUTIN DID NOT HAVE THE POWER TO TAKE ANY ACTIONS NOW. [REDACTED] NOTED THAT PUTIN'S EFFORTS TO GAIN MORE CONTROL OVER THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S SUBJECTS SHOWED HE WANTED TO STRENGTHEN CENTRAL CONTROL. HOWEVER, THOSE PUTIN MIGHT APPOINT OR PROMOTE FOR POSITIONS NOT ONLY NEEDED PUTIN, BUT PUTIN NEEDED THEM. (NOTE: [REDACTED] POLLING ABOUT THE CANDIDATE'S PLATFORMS SHOWS THAT THE MAJORITY OF VOTERS BELIEVE THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS OF PUTIN'S "PROGRAM" ARE "VICTORY IN CHECHNYA" AND "STRENGTHENING THE STATE." FOM POLLS IN FEBRUARY SHOW THAT WHILE 49 PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS DO NOT KNOW HOW THE ECONOMY WOULD DEVELOP UNDER PUTIN, 53 PERCENT THINK HE WILL MANAGE THE ECONOMY SUCCESSFULLY. END NOTE)

COMMENT

1. (SBU) POLLS SEEM TO INDICATE THAT VOTERS SEE IN PUTIN A NEW PRESIDENT WHO AT LEAST APPEARS TO HAVE THE ENERGY TO DEAL WITH THEIR PROBLEMS, UNLIKE YELTSIN WHO WAS CONSIDERED TOO ILL AND WEAK DURING MUCH OF HIS SECOND TERM. VOTERS SEEM TO HAVE NO MORE SPECIFIC HOPES FOR A PUTIN ADMINISTRATION THAN TO HAVE A PRESIDENT WHO IS ENGAGED AND WHO WANTS TO MAKE RUSSIA

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STRONG AGAIN. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH POLLING DATA AND ANALYSIS THAT ATTRIBUTE PUTIN'S POPULARITY TO HIS STRONG IMAGE AS EVIDENCED BY THE CHECHNYA OPERATION.

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