

Weekly Wrap: Hawaii, Elton John and the Quran

By [Unfair Observer](#)

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This week was election week in Russia. High in the clouds, President Vladimir Putin circled Syria while Russia elected His vicars on Earth. Voting went as planned because, as we already know, voters who dare throw curveballs have the roads to their homes destroyed. A valiant attempt by the liberal opposition to challenge the status quo in a single region was dashed on the rocks of complacency and a desire to keep those roads.

The single exciting thing to come out of the vote was the decision of the election authorities to hold classes in countering Golos, the independent vote monitor. That's right, election officials will be taught how to combat people who combat vote rigging.

Before you fall out of your chair in surprise, recall that Russia's elections chief Vladimir Churov announced last week that he had been made junior chief of a Nigerian tribe. It makes sense for a man with a monarchist track record (yep, Russia's elections are managed by an ex-monarchist) and — at the risk of sounding offensive — explains a lot about Russian elections.

Though that's not really fair to Nigeria, it outperforms Russia in democracy rankings. But Nigeria also has those Ida swords, perfect for disputes with pesky vote monitors. Thank God the senior chief of our tribe does not permit this particular foreign practice, yet.

A Hawaiian King

Moscow will host a separatist conference on Sunday. No, not just another PR opportunity for the insurgency in eastern Ukraine — the state-funded show will attract independence fighters from such long-oppressed places as Texas and Hawaii, as well as Catalonia, Ireland, Puerto Rico and Western Sahara. Organizers say that the one thing the motley bunch of attendees has in common is staunch anti-Americanism, because it's always Obama's fault, even in the Sahara.

The sexy thing about this freedom carnival is that in 2013 Russia made separatism propaganda — or, more accurately, "promotion of the violation of the integrity of the Russian Federation" — illegal and punishable by hefty fines or three years in jail.

So essentially, separatism is a felony in Russia, but it's perfectly OK in Hawaii. Because it's Obama's fault (did I mention that?), and because Hawaiian King Kaumuali'i considered joining Russia in 1816, but it didn't work out. Kaumuali'i's descendants best be careful now, or they'll find Russia's polite green men on their shores to boost Russia's territorial integrity like in Crimea.

And as for Karelia, Kuban, Tatarstan, Yakutia and the rest of Siberia, all places where people have been ruminating on their own affiliations with Russia for quite a while — relax guys, it's not about you. Unlike Hawaii, you have no reason to leave, didn't you know that?

Party Trolls

Putin's own international adventures this week included a prank call to Sir Elton John. Two Russian pranksters pulled Elton's leg and pretended to be Putin and his spokesman Dmitry Peskov after the singer said he'd love to discuss gay rights with Putin. The happy Elton reported the fake encounter on his Instagram, generating so much embarrassment that even the real Peskov advised the pranksters to apologize.

The odd thing is that, as pranks go, the actual conversation was long and terribly boring because all the pranksters were interested in was Elton's visit to Ukraine and his meeting with the bad, bad Poroshenko, and gay-bashing Nazis in Odessa. Not a joke in sight for 11 goddamn minutes.

But you know, there are really tons of trolls like that out there, pursuing the Kremlin's agenda. None of them has ever made a single funny joke, but the party line is a serious matter anyway.

Peskov and his boss may not have had anything to do with it, really. But that's even worse: If you breed trolls, one day they'll spin out of control and embarrass you before everyone's favorite singer — and they won't even be funny.

Charges Against Allah

And meanwhile, one of the more exciting ban battles in Russia rumbled on — the one over the extremist Quran. A book with Quran quotes was banned last month as fanning religious hatred, prompting threats from Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov to personally punish the "shaitans" who outlawed it.

Instead, Kadyrov filed a court complaint. More recently, a Muslim lawmaker asked that the court be investigated for connections to the U.S. secret services (because it's always Obama's fault), while the Russian Orthodox Church, in a fit of good sense, proposed a moratorium on examining ancient scriptures for extremism.

You may call it absurd, but it is lovely to watch how Russia takes baby steps toward political correctness. Of course, it treads on everyone's corns in the process, and its political correctness is about as modern as a four-in-hand charabanc, but you have to start somewhere.

What Russia still has to learn, however, is that when grandmasters of political correctness censor 20th-century children's books, and try to align 1,000-year-old manuscripts with the modern Criminal Code, it is usually a doomed affair. Might as well ban them all — or ban everything but these manuscripts. Or give up bans and rely on common sense, but this is obviously not on the agenda — which is very Old Testament of the censors.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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