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July 31, 2000
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These accusations are extremely troubling. Princeton faculty and students carry out research in many countries. An accusation of espionage against any one of them could bring into question the legitimacy of other research projects. I therefore looked into this matter, and I found that the FSB suspicions are totally groundless.

First of all, Handler has never had any association with the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). I can only guess that the FSB got this idea from a confusion of acronyms with one of the research centers within Princeton University with which Handler is associated: the Center for International Studies (CIS) or the Center for Energy and Environmental Studies (CEES).

Secondly, with regard to the "materials of an 'intelligence nature'" that the FSB reportedly found in Mr. Handler's apartment, he had with him 30-year-old declassified satellite images of Russian nuclear-weapon storage sites. US Vice-President Gore made a major public announcement of the declassification of these materials in 1995. Handler obtained them from the US National Archives in connection with research project that he had conducted on the ability of Russia to safely store warheads removed from its missiles. A Russian expert had written an article arguing that it would be impossible for Russia to "de-alert" a large fraction of its missiles by removing and storing their warheads because of lack of adequate storage. Handler did his research on this topic in a completely open manner. Indeed, on October 5, 1999, he presented his research in a seminar, "The Safe Storage of Nuclear Weapons in Russia and Disarmament Problems," in Moscow at the Center for Policy Research in Russia. He had previously presented it at two international arms-control conferences in Washington, D.C., and Obninsk.

After the FSB's October 27, 1999 search of his apartment, Mr. Handler sent a detailed letter to the FSB through his host, Dr. Sergei Rogov, Director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies, describing his research and career and offering to meet with the FSB investigators to answer any questions. The only FSB response was to follow him conspicuously and to interrogate any Russians with whom he spoke. After a week of this treatment, the U.S. embassy advised Handler to return to Princeton, which he did. He has since spoken to the FSB investigator several times by phone from Princeton and continued to offer to respond to any questions that the FSB may forward to him. He has also suggested he could meet with competent officials from the Russian embassy in Washington or consulate in New York. However, no questions have arrived to date, and the FSB has still not returned to Mr. Handler the laptop computer and all of the research materials that it confiscated from him. Instead, the FSB has reportedly been telling researchers in Moscow that Mr. Handler was involved in some kind of "criminal activity."