

# **RUSSIA AND THE DOUBLE-HEADED WEST: CONTOURS OF A NEW TRIANGULAR RELATIONSHIP**

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The year 2000 has brought about a series of changes which have the potential of substantially reshaping Russia's relations with the two parts of the «double-headed West», i.e., America and EU-Europe. The first new element is the arrival of Vladimir Putin to the presidency of Russia, and the end of the Yeltsin era in Russian politics. The second one is the American presidential election and the end of the unique era of America's involvement with Russia under the Clinton administration, which tried, and failed, to be a benevolent facilitator of Russia's post-Communist transition. The third, and quite likely the one fraught with the most far-reaching consequences, is the gradual emergence of a European security and defense identity to complement the EU's economic, financial and political dimensions. The immediate cumulative impact of these changes is the drawing of a line under the period of immediate post-Cold War adjustment in Europe. The relationship between Russia and what is still collectively referred to as "the West" is becoming increasingly triangular.

This article will look at the emerging pattern of this three-corner relationship. The signal feature of the new situation is the growing concentration of each actor (or group of actors, in Europe's case) on itself. This is unlikely to change in the next several years. The European Union will proceed along the dual track of further consolidation and enlargement; the United States, for all its unprecedented national power and international influence, is becoming less interested in foreign affairs; as to Russia, it will continue to grapple with the mammoth task of its post-Communist transformation. As Europe and Russia progress, however, they will need to construct new international identities for themselves. America, on the other hand, will keep its identity but will seek to modify the terms of its engagement with the rest of the world. Thus, contours of a very new relationship will gradually emerge. Within the triangle, the Transatlantic element will become more important than the traditional East-West element. Over time, the U.S. and the EU will probably become more equal, though not necessarily more distant. Moscow, however, will not be able to exploit this situation, which the Soviet Union had always regarded as a golden strategic opportunity to enhance its role in Europe. Rather, Russia will face the choice of un-splendid isolation on the continent that it shares with the EU, and an accelerated drift to irrelevance as an international player, or of genuinely embracing the notion of a partnership and association with the EU, while at the same time pragmatically seeking a working relationship with the United States in the financial, nuclear and geopolitical areas, in particular to protect its flanks in the south and the east. Although it is unlikely that this choice, requiring no less than a change of Russia's international identity and departure from its 500-year-old pattern of behavior, or, on the other hand, a rejection of age-old hopes of "becoming a normal (i.e., a European) country", will be made under President Putin, his presidency will provide the key ingredients for it.

## **A Sketch of Putin's Foreign Policy**

From the outset, Vladimir Putin stressed Moscow's foreign policy continuity. Boris Yeltsin's last prime minister himself, he retained the key figures of the Yeltsin foreign and security policy establishment, including Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, the Kremlin's foreign policy adviser Sergei Prikhodko. Even the former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, a rival in the 1999 parliamentary election, has been subsequently engaged by the Kremlin as an occasional consultant and charged with brokering a peace settlement in Moldova.

In comparison to Yeltsin's period, there are palpable changes, however. Russia's first president started out as a quasi-ally of the West who sought a formal alliance with America and NATO. He ended, eight years later, on the dismal note of a new Cold War, issuing dark warnings from Beijing. Neither alliance nor confrontation, however, were consummated. Through Yeltsin's entire reign, "unpredictability" remained the most outstanding feature of the Kremlin's foreign policy. Psychologically, Yeltsin was all sound and fury, who felt at ease in a crisis and found it difficult to function coherently in calmer times.

By contrast, Putin's initial trademark, actively marketed by his «political technologists», has been his pragmatism. This apparently businesslike, no-nonsense approach has been widely acclaimed, both at home and abroad. Elected in March 2000 virtually hands down, Mr. Putin has continued to receive the support of about 60 % of the population in the following months. Even the Kursk submarine disaster in August did not depress his popularity ratings. A version of pragmatism has been adapted for foreign policy needs. The Kremlin has again become predictable.

Outwardly, Putin's general approach to foreign affairs was almost the exact opposite to Yeltsin's. Russia's first president could occasionally use harsh words, but he remained in principle someone personally committed to maintaining friendly relations with the West, which to him were very much personalized. Clinton, Kohl and Chirac stood for the U.S., Germany and France, respectively. Yeltsin's successor has so far abstained from using strong language in the area of foreign policy, but has enjoyed demonstrating imperviousness to Western criticism of his

actions and showing no particular interest in the back-slapping, «ties-off» encounters with his foreign colleagues. The era of sauna diplomacy is definitely over.

The changes went deeper than the personal style of Russia's "first person". The rhetoric of multipolarity associated with Evgeni Primakov that dominated Yeltsin's second presidency was not discarded, but somewhat de-emphasized. Putin must have pragmatically concluded that multipolarity, a code-word for an attempt to build an international coalition to check America's global dominance, was in practice leading to unnecessary and potentially costly stand-offs with Washington. When America had to be challenged, it was to be with a view to some concrete gain to Russia, not in the name of some abstract principle.

Still, pragmatism, for all its current appeal to the Russian electorate, and its instrumentality for electoral purposes, is no substitute for a basic philosophical concept. Mr. Putin realizes this. He is no political philosopher, but he has some very deep instincts, if not beliefs. These instincts and beliefs are unashamedly statist. While Yeltsin was a man of the regime that he created, presided over and carefully fostered, Putin is a man of the state with its bureaucracy and regulations. Yeltsin was concerned with the intricate system of checks and balances that made him the indispensable arbiter of the Russian political scene; Putin is concerned with making the organization of the Russian state more efficient. From the beginning of his presidency, there was a clear emphasis on codifying principles, objectives and methods in various strategy papers.

At the heart of Putin's foreign policy philosophy is the notion of Russia as a great European power. It is characteristic that to him Russia's culture is Western European (a fully understandable phrase, coming from a native of Leningrad/St.Petersburg). While much was made of the portrait of Peter the Great, which reportedly hangs in the President's office, his ideal appears to be the Russian empire's "golden age" under Alexander III (r. 1881-1894): Russia was then politically arch-conservative and quiet while rapidly developing economically, and exercising a foreign policy of moderation, at peace with its neighbors and yet genuinely respected or even held in awe by them. On the world stage, Russia stood alone (in Emperor Alexander's memorable phrase, Russia had only two true friends in the world, the Russian army and the Russian navy), and yet was on good terms with both Germany and France, and was confidently playing its part in the Great Game east and south of the Caspian with the British empire.

Accordingly, Putin has opted for an independent but cautious foreign policy course which, as far as the West is concerned, eschews both second-class partnership and irresponsible confrontation. If one reads Putin's Internet article which appeared two days before Yeltsin's resignation, one is impressed that Putin's «Russia project» is clearly focused on the economy. Economic liberalism and massive foreign investments are presented as the only hope for Russia's economy. This liberalism and openness, however, are married to the notion of a strong state. Thus, the master idea is to rebuild Russia as a strong and powerful country based on a sound economic foundation. In Putin's eye, this is the supreme national interest. Foreign policy is considered to be important as a critical resource of Western investments and technology. Putin and his associates have evidently concluded that the method of achieving this is cold pragmatism, rather than kowtowing to the West.

To President Putin, a judo wrestler, strength and weakness are important categories. He inherited an extremely weak Russia; as President, he sees his task in making it strong again. It is characteristic that he publicly rejects both deference to foreign – largely American – advice (believed to be the hallmark of the early Yeltsin period) and self-reliance as a choice of a weak country. In his logic, it is the weak who become followers or withdraw into isolation. His ideal is a strong Russia that is self-confident, well respected and fully integrated into the world community. An ideal, admittedly, difficult to achieve. A simple vision of a strong Russia is not enough. What should be the basis and quality of that strength? To what uses would it be employed? More specific goals and detailed objectives are needed for the vision to become a blueprint. The route has to be mapped by means of a careful strategy.

Contrary to his cultivated public image, the Russian president does not appear to be either a strong leader or a strong ruler. His power vis-à-vis the various vested interests are dependent on his popular support. Should it give way (e.g., as a result of liberal economic measures), other players will be able to challenge the President on important issues. Populist policies, however, would spell the end of economic reform and a crash of Putin's larger ambitions.

Whereas Russia's foreign policy apparatus has been functioning more efficiently under Putin than under his predecessor, the fundamental fragmentation of the Russian national interest remains more or less intact. The oligarchs are fewer and less conspicuous, and the vested interests more difficult to trace, but they have not vanished. The difference is that while under Yeltsin non-state actors were often playing alongside with the state, or even challenged it, now they tend to continue their games from within the state machine.

Putin presides over a very heterogeneous regime which consists of three elements: what is left of the "family" (the surviving oligarchs with special ties to the Kremlin, and their allies in the presidential administration, who engineered Putin's appointment and subsequent rise to the top position), the security services elite (brought to power by Putin himself), and a group of liberal economists (who are expected to turn the country around and lead

it from crisis to growth). This is an uneasy and clearly temporary alliance whose members must have very different interests also in the realm of foreign policy.

Once the family clique is sidelined, which appears likely, it is not difficult to see that the philosophies of the national security elite and the economic liberals are fundamentally different, if not opposed to each other. The President has a hard time trying to harmonize those differences. When faced with a real challenge, he will have to choose, and there are reasons to believe that a failure of the liberal reform will have a major impact on the domestic situation and can change the course of Russia's foreign policy.

None of Putin's associates can really be called a foreign policy architect. Ivanov is an able diplomat and competent head of the still sprawling MFA apparatus, Prikhodko is an aide without an ambition of becoming the Kremlin's eminence grise. The military chiefs – be it Marshal Sergeev or General Kvashnin – have very narrow and parochial agendas. Only Sergei Ivanov has a broad brief which allows him to talk and act in the President's name in the realm of foreign and security policy, but he betrays little interest in conceptualizing.

On the face of it, the charge of a conceptual vacuum is unfair. One of the first decrees of Putin as acting president (on 5. January 2000) officially endorsed a new national security concept. This was followed by a new military doctrine (in April) and a new foreign policy concept (in July). Put together, they seem to be an impressive body of thought. Yet, there is less here than meets the eye. An analysis of the key provisions of the documents dealing with the relations with the West leaves one with much confusion.

As noted above, the point of departure for Putin's foreign policy is the admission of Russia's current weakness. In the relations with the West, this had translated into a series of failures. The first one was Moscow's early failure to become an equal partner to Washington. The coveted condominium never materialized: Russia was too weak and too chaotic for the role its leaders claimed and America saw no reason in spending a lot of treasure and infinite patience for cultivating Russia. This first disillusionment was soon followed by a real foreign policy defeat for Moscow when it was unable to forestall developments that purportedly undermined its overall position in Europe (such as NATO enlargement, the war against Yugoslavia). Third came the failure to create a positive image of Russia abroad – due to the crime and corruption scandals, the two Chechen wars, and, more recently, the decaying infrastructure and the sense that the whole country is crumbling to pieces.

Another cardinal point in contemporary Russian foreign policy thinking is the growing awareness of the importance of non-military factors in international relations. The economy and the finances are at the heart of both domestic and foreign policy (at least as far as the West is concerned). This was brought home in a particularly brutal way by the financial collapse of 1998. This realization is coupled with the admission of Russia's resource constraints. In a situation where Russia's external debt has reached \$150 billion, and servicing it consumes a heavy portion of the federal budget, Western financial institutions such as the Paris and London clubs of creditors, and the principal lending institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have securely occupied the high ground of Russian-Western relations. Russia's membership in the G-8 is both a source of pride and breeding ground for an inferiority complex.

Unable to join the West on the conditions which it would prefer and unwilling to lose its great-power sovereignty and freedom of maneuver, the Kremlin sees the "unipolar structure" of present-day international relations and the domination of Western institutions within it as a challenge and potentially a threat. Recent Russian official documents display a long catalogue of threats to Russia's security many of which are believed to come from the West.

Top among those are the so-called Cold War "consequences", i.e., the skeptical view of Russia held by influential quarters in the West, and the propensity to use force. This syndrome is believed to be largely of American origin. The Russian government condemns humanitarian interventions as attacks on state sovereignty which it openly calls destabilizing. No matter how improbable it might seem, the 1999 air war against Yugoslavia was perceived by many members of the Russian elites as a warning to Russia that it had to comply with U.S. diktat on a wide range of security issues – or face similar consequences.

Just a notch down come the "attempts to ignore (or to infringe upon) the interests of the Russian Federation in solving international security problems, to impede its (i.e., Russia's) consolidation as one of the influential centers of the multipolar world". This wording reflects the belief that the West sees Russia as a potential competitor and wants to keep it weak and disorganized as long as it can, and use this period for shaping a world environment with only minimal input from Russia. Ideally, it is often claimed, America would want to create a «world without Russia».

Next come "deployment (reinforcement) of forces close to the borders of the RF or its allies which lead to a violation of the existing balance of forces". A variation of this threat is the "introduction of foreign forces in the territory of the bordering and friendly countries which violate the UN Charter". Such deployments would often be the result of the "enlargement of military blocs or alliances to the detriment of the Russian military security". This

reflects a very traditional view of international affairs as a zero sum game. Since Russia is not in NATO, and was its adversary for four decades, it continues to count Western military might as potentially hostile. The reality of NATO's military expansion, territorial as well as functional, lends credence to the more general political fears stated above.

Russian concept papers stress the need for a balanced multidirectional foreign policy. Past fixation on America is considered to be a mistake: Moscow would have to accept Washington's lead in any comprehensive partnership; Russia's resources would be sucked dry in any serious confrontation with the U.S. An interesting point is that whereas relations with America per se are mentioned in the foreign policy concept only briefly, and serious, even fundamental disagreements between Washington and Moscow are stressed, Europe is given more time and a far more positive treatment. Russia's principal stated goal, it is said, is a "stable and democratic system of all-European security and cooperation".

Thus, concept papers are enlightening and thus useful, but also highly contradictory. They assume that Russia will continue into the 21st century as an essentially independent player in a global balance-of-power environment, but fail to address the paramount issue (obvious to all balance-of-power geopoliticians) of disparities in power distribution that put Russia, with her limited resources for an independent international pole, at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other power centers. While deploring the Cold War mentality, they continue to view the West as the principal source of dangers and threats to Russia and her interests. If anything, the Asian centers of power are deemed to be inherently friendlier toward Russia and psychologically closer to her than the West, but little thought is given to how much longer this situation will continue. The traditional penchant for looking at Europe as the arena of competition, and withdrawing into Asia to recuperate and gather forces for a new power match in the west continues to hold sway in the high councils. In view of Russia's current problems and recent frustrations all this is understandable, but hardly sustainable even over the medium term, as Central, South and especially East Asia are becoming the world's principal strategic playing field. Actions, of course, speak louder than mere words, but analysis of actions only confirms the impression of the reigning fundamental confusion at the heart of Russia's Western policy. Two mini case studies that follow concentrate on the Balkans and the Caspian.

## **1999: a Year of Kosovo and Chechnya**

In 1999, the Russian elites and public alike were shocked by the NATO action against Yugoslavia. This reaction was not due to any special historical bonds between the Russians and the Serbs. Two things mattered to Moscow: Russia's role in Europe and its military security vis-à-vis the West. The Atlantic Alliance had for the first time in its history used force on a massive scale. The UN Security Council was obviated, basically to get Russia out of the way. Thus, Russia's role in Europe's security was de facto sharply reduced. Fears of more Kosovos to the east (e.g., in the Caucasus, where Georgian officials began to look up to NATO's intervention as a way of solving the Abkhazian issue, or even as close to home as Belarus to help topple Lukashenko, another pariah Slav leader). Had it not been for Yeltsin, Moscow could have taken an openly confrontational attitude – e.g., by sending arms to Belgrade – which would have put Russia and the West on a collision course. In the event, the elite opposition was confined to loud protests. Former Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin, the Yeltsin-appointed Balkans mediator, immediately became an anti-hero with the bulk of the political elite. In order to appease his military and keep them under control, Yeltsin had to sanction the highly risky dash to Pristina by Russian paratroopers. The situation would have become much more serious if the Russians had decided to go ahead with reinforcement of their small contingent by air, despite Romanian and Bulgarian refusal to allow overflight of their territories. (Russian recklessness paralleled the policies of the Alliance, which were even riskier – from the start of the bombing campaign itself to the real possibility of a massive ground invasion of Serbia by NATO forces).

As a result, the Russian official worldview hardened: America was seen as openly hegemonistic, and Europe as its willing accomplice – even against its best interests, in Moscow's view -, and the actual use of military force was back again as a major factor. Moreover, many made the point that it was Russia's weakness that had provoked, even invited the West. An «aggression of the Balkan type» against Russia's allies or Russia itself became an apparently credible scenario which replaced hopefully outdated Cold War ones. Thus, NATO was again recast as a potential adversary. Nuclear weapons were elevated even higher as the ultimate line of defense. In addition, the Russian armed forces were told to get ready to repel an invasion by NATO's aircraft and cruise missiles. Ironically, even as the Russian Armed Forces were holding their biggest command post exercise in a decade, code-named «West-99», complete with imitated nuclear-armed cruise missile launches off Iceland, Shamil Basayev and his group of Chechen rebels were preparing for a raid into neighboring Dagestan.

As a result, Kosovo was pushed back by Chechnya. There, the Russians sought both to imitate the West and preempt its hypothetical move into the area, in accordance with the Alliance's 1999 Strategic Concept. In the first few months of the second Chechen war, the Russian high command organized military action on a massive scale (unlike the indecisive start of the 1994-96 war), sought to use more fully their technological superiority, and refused to negotiate, demanding an unconditional surrender of the enemy. Above all, the Russian leadership ignored the cease-fire pleas from the West, and enjoyed it. Up to a point, Chechnya had to answer for Kosovo. A message was sent to the West: Russia will not tolerate foreign interference in its internal affairs.

The message arrived in a soft wrapping. In the fall and winter of 1999-2000, Putin typically abstained from harsh polemics with the West on Chechnya (which many in Russia considered inevitable, and some even desirable), without yielding an inch on Moscow's policies. He even proceeded to restore the relationship with NATO, having had to overrule some of the top generals, and raised the hypothetical issue of Russia's membership in the Alliance.

The Chechen war shattered the recent Russian myth of the "two Wests": one being good, friendly and peaceful (Europe/EU), and the other one bad, arrogant and warlike (U.S./NATO), which had been popular from the mid-1990s. The Europeans criticized Moscow's policies generally more vehemently than the Americans. Putin himself had to experience the full force of that criticism in October 1999 at the EU summit in Helsinki. In a humiliating decision, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voted to suspend the voting rights of the Russian delegation, which retaliated by a refusal to attend the Assembly's sessions. The war led to Russia's isolation not only from the traditional West, but within the OSCE, which she had sought for a long time to elevate to the position of the premier European security institution. Russia's new problems with the OSCE are its increasingly "eastern orientation" in the sense of concentrating on the former USSR and the former Yugoslavia, and its stand on Chechnya. Ironically, President Clinton took a more conciliatory approach at the Organization's summit in Istanbul than many European leaders, and NATO, instead of threatening Russia with sanctions (as the EU did), stressed the need to restore the relationship suspended in the wake of Kosovo.

Putin turned the attitude taken by European governments to Chechnya into a touchstone for their attitudes toward Russia in general. Britain, whose Prime Minister Tony Blair traveled to St. Petersburg in March 2000 while the war was still raging, was credited with Putin's first visit as President-elect. Italy and Spain were also rewarded with early Presidential visits, as was Germany (though the fact that Berlin was not at the very top of the list of Putin's European destinations did signal a degree of disapproval). It was France that was singled out for censure. It seems that until his trip to the EU-Russia summit in Paris in October 2000 Putin did not feel it necessary to hold talks with Jacques Chirac.

Events in Russian-Western relations were proceeding in 1999-2000 in quick succession: barely three months after the end of the war over Kosovo, the second Chechen war started. In spring 2000, as the situation in the Caucasus entered the phase of a protracted guerrilla war, the issue of a National Missile Defense (NMD) for the United States came to the fore. The important and fortunate thing was that the acute phases of these three crises did not overlap. Also, on this latest problem, Moscow and the European allies of the United States took very similar views (although for different reasons), namely, that NMD would be strategically destabilizing.

The Putin administration took a series of measures aimed at undermining the rationale for NMD. Putin won an early victory in the Russian Duma with the ratification of the START-2 treaty that had been languishing in the Parliament for many years after its signature by Bush and Yeltsin in January 1993. He had the Duma ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), putting pressure on the U.S. and China as the only nuclear powers who have not ratified. He held firm during the June 2000 summit with President Clinton in Moscow, refusing to compromise on the ABM treaty, after which he immediately proposed to the West Europeans that they join with Russia and America (also invited, but separately) in an effort to build theater missile defenses (TMD) for Europe, using the Russian S-300 and S-400 air defense systems as a prototype. Then, just before the G8 summit in Okinawa in July 2000, he made a trip to North Korea, giving Kim Jong Il a chance to sound a conciliatory note on the missile issue.

Putin's motives on TMD must have been guided by multiple motives: to exploit Europe's ambivalent attitude toward missile defense (dual fear of strategic decoupling from the U.S. and of alienating Russia), to appear ready for new multilateral approaches to address the growing missile threat, and to look for a market for Russian defense manufacturers. The central objective, it seems, was bringing pressure to bear on the Clinton administration in the crucial months before its decision on NMD.

The decision to postpone a decision on NMD deployments until the new administration was in the White House was primarily due to the technical problems encountered. The lack of enthusiasm among the U.S. allies and the vocal opposition by Russia and China did have a role, but, despite suggestions to the contrary, it was clearly secondary. The decision on NMD is and is likely to remain a domestic American issue. In the fall of 2000, there was simply nothing to deploy.

To summarize, 1999 and 2000, highlighted by Kosovo and Chechnya, have produced a set of new developments which are making the pattern of Russian-Western relations more complex than before.

NATO enlargement (effective from the spring of 1999) and the Kosovo crisis have resulted in Russian-Western estrangement, and then alienation. Moscow first failed in its bid to preserve a wide buffer zone to the west of its borders, and then discovered that it could not prevent NATO using force outside of its territory in Europe. However, NATO's eastward movement did not lead to the apocalyptic consequences often predicted in 1994-97: Poland's only unfriendly gesture to date has been the expulsion of nine Russian diplomats in 2000 accused of spying, a symbolic act of defiance toward the former overlord, probably played for domestic or even personal

reasons. As to Kosovo, a year on, it does not look an unmitigated success story for NATO, and there is little enthusiasm, either in America or Europe, for new expeditions of a similar kind. In this context, a new Cold War, widely prophesied at the end of 1999, did not set in. Russia did not have the resources or a compelling reason to stand up to the West, and the West had no interest in cornering Russia.

Russia's relations with the United States suffered more, for America was held responsible for both the enlargement and Kosovo, but the Chechen war led to a substantial deterioration in Russian-West European relations. Ironically, as ties with NATO were partially restored, those with the EU came under strain. Moscow's former favorites in the political and humanitarian fields, such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe, have become its severe critics. The Russians have discovered that it was easier to deal with power-conscious Americans than with the rights-concerned Europeans.

Fluid combinations of national interest and circumstances make all sorts of virtual coalitions and relations of adversity: e.g., Russia and France were close as far as their attitude toward the NMD and Iraq were concerned, but they quarreled bitterly over Chechnya (and indirectly over Kosovo, where Moscow moved against Bernard Kouchner, the UN representative). By the same token, Russia and Germany were appreciably close on the Balkans, but Berlin took a harsh line against writing off Russia's Soviet-era debt, etc.

## **2000 and beyond: Central Asia**

Kosovo highlighted the old Western threat in a new garb. Chechnya, however, pointed in a totally different direction. Being pragmatists, Putin and his national security advisers are looking south for a clear and present danger. This danger is far bigger than Chechnya. Both the President and his Security Council secretary are talking about an arc of instability stretching from Kosovo to the Caucasus to Central Asia to the Philippines. The danger is generically labeled international terrorism, and the current variety is Islamic extremism. Putin was appointed Prime Minister when a takeover of Dagestan by "Wahhabists" seemed imminent. In his domino theory view, the loss of Dagestan would have effectively led to the loss of the North Caucasus, and the destabilization of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in the middle of the Russian territory.

Ominously, the raid into Dagestan coincided with first major armed clashes between the Wahhabists and the government forces of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which had a very hard time handling the extremists. The fact that the two episodes happened simultaneously led to speculations that some "terrorist international" was at work. In the summer of 2000 the fighting in Central Asia was re-ignited, this time engulfing Uzbek territory. The Russian authorities took this seriously. Reminiscences of the Mongol yoke were evoked in the official press.

While on Chechnya, the Russians saw the West as generally unhelpful, mostly concerned with preventing Russia's comeback as a major player in the Caspian region that the United States officials had portrayed as an area where the U.S. had certain national interests, things were somewhat different in Central Asia. True, until 1999, Russia had been concerned with the rise of Washington's influence in Uzbekistan and to a lesser extent elsewhere in the region that was assigned to the U.S. Central Command. In the face of the danger of internal unrest in the Fergana valley and spillover from Afghanistan, Moscow was gratified, however, to see Tashkent coming to the conclusion that, when push came to shove, the United States would not bail it out. Other states in the area, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan had renewed their politico-military ties with Moscow and extended the life of the Collective Security Treaty.

What is more, Russia and the Western powers for the first time had the same adversary, namely Ossama bin Laden (who was suspected of having supported the Chechen rebels and the Central Asian extremists). Moscow and Washington also had similar worries about the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. The Great Game logic was not holding. Preventing the spread of American influence or the reconstitution of Russian domination were pushed back by the necessity of combating a common enemy. In August 2000, Russia and America issued a common statement on Afghanistan, and their soldiers cooperated – alongside with the Europeans and Central Asians – in the CENTRASBAT-2000 exercises in southern Kazakhstan. It would be too far-fetched to claim, as President Putin and his cohorts do, that Russia was becoming America's and Western Europe's principal barrier against the rising forces of Islamic extremism (as some Russian officials and commentators did), but the specter of the Great Game was suddenly dispelled and a commonality of interest became evident. The question was, how it would square with the developments on "the Western front", and what it meant for the prospects of Russia's relations with the U.S. and the EU.

## **Prospects**

When faced with the choice between what has been long known for a fact and what is new and untested, the cautious prefer sticking with the former, while exploring the possibilities of the latter. In Russian-Western relations, this holds true as anywhere.

Although the Russian leadership slowly appreciates the paramount importance of the European Union for its own economic development, and its future status in Europe, the focus on NATO is still sharper. Conversely, while America and Western Europe generally see the need for including Russia into a common security framework, the concern about Russian neo-imperialism is still at least equally strong.

This could change over time, but only gradually so. The Russians for the first time have become genuinely interested in the implications for themselves of EU integration. The arrival of the euro, despite its subsequent problems, did deliver a message in Moscow. The prospect of a common foreign and security policy, a European security and defense identity, the decision on a rapid reaction corps, complete with decision-making infrastructure and a military headquarters going beyond the 1996 CJTF model, struck a familiar note and raised some fears, including far-out ones, but the net result is the growing appreciation in Russia of Europe's potential future role. Even more to the point, the prospect of EU enlargement practically all the way to the Russian border raises the prospect of a "common European home" without Russia, which would remain the only country on the continent standing alone. Of course, Moscow started to pay attention to the Union, not just its individual members.

Clearly, the individual members will not just wither away. Even in the most optimistic scenario, the EU is still decades away from a single power center. It may never become one. Germany, France and Britain are too strong entities to dissolve in a European cocktail. The euro's start has not been spectacular. The future relationship between the reinvigorated EU and NATO is not very clear. The EU's common strategies, including the one on Russia, are more lists of principles and procedural frameworks than a strategy. Unfortunately, in her present state Russia is not particularly interesting for its European neighbors. Chechnya will remain a lingering problem, at least like the Kurdish issue with respect to Turkey. Finally, the domestic political going in Russia may well be rough, which will reduce the incentive for cooperation even more.

Even then, Russian-European relations have crossed a threshold. Moscow will have to learn to live with a Union embracing most of the rest of the continent. This union will become progressively more of an integrated – although much more complex – whole, and thus a power center *sui generis*. Russia will need to find a response to the dual challenge of EU integration and enlargement, it can't simply ignore it.

By the same token, the Transatlantic partnership will be gradually reshaped, and a new balance will need to be struck, on a more equal footing. America is unlikely to withdraw its forces completely, but the end of residual Cold War concerns will help restructure and redirect U.S. military presence and, more importantly, modify the essence of the Transatlantic relationship. A divorce across the Atlantic is highly unlikely. With Britain remaining central to the EU security structure, the US will not be estranged. Germany, however, is likely to exert more influence, and France will look for new balances. NATO will probably survive, with a new mission-sharing arrangement. In the medium- and long-term future, the EU will have to pay more attention to Russia than the U.S. will. Having sorted out its current agenda, Europe will need to think about some form of integration of Russia within a wider Europe. This project will probably be driven by Germany. If and when it comes, this new arrangement will become a powerful factor in international relations, impacting U.S. foreign policy as well.

### **In this light, there are serious questions for Europe to consider:**

- How to progressively build in Russia, while at the same time keeping her at a safe distance?
- How to construct a lasting security relationship with Russia without letting her in prematurely and on the other hand preventing her frustration with Europe?
- If Russia is no longer a potential adversary, what is the rationale for Europe's subordination to America in security matters?

This is a long-term prospect. In the more immediate future, one will have to concentrate on ensuring that the current and future problems in Russian-Western relations do not permanently damage the relationship.

First come the Balkans, which are essentially Europe's responsibility. The credibility of the European Union as an actor in its own right will be closely watched by interested observers in America and Russia. For Europe to take the lead, it will need to be able to assure the security aspect of the rehabilitation project, to organize the economic assistance and to provide for a regional political settlement. None of this is possible without America's cooperation, and none is desirable without Russia's contribution. Meanwhile, the situation in Kosovo has been deteriorating, and Montenegro can become a new flashpoint.

Second, the issue of national missile defenses, which is America's responsibility. The incoming administration in the United States should carefully weigh the pros and cons for going ahead with the NMD system. A decision which ignores Europe's objections and Russia's opposition could not only lead to Russia becoming even less cooperative where it will matter to the U.S. (mainly in Asia), but would impair America's relationship with its allies.

Third, NATO enlargement. Russia has already demonstrated its inability to stop former Warsaw Pact allies from joining NATO. Her resources to oppose a new round of enlargement are minimal, and her threats to resort to "adequate measures" in case of an ex-Soviet republic being admitted ring hollow, and rightly so. Yet, the effect of past enlargement on Russia's foreign policy should not be underestimated. Coupled with the NMD issue, and a new crisis in the Balkans, it might create a critical mass for Russia moving from the present state of alienation from the West to the state of hostility toward it. Enlargement to include Slovenia or Slovakia, Bulgaria or even Romania would not spark a new row; Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia will. This is not an issue of vetoes, but rather of the political price to pay.

Fourth, EU enlargement. This is much less controversial, but the Union, the acceding states and Russia must agree on a set of measures to mitigate the impact of the enlargement on Russia's economy and its population. The accession of Poland and the Baltic States will create new political, economic, military and humanitarian realities, which need to be addressed. In particular, Kaliningrad must be prevented from sliding into a "black hole" and helped along the road toward integration with its neighborhood and toward becoming a permanent two-way channel between the Union and Russia.

Regrettably, the Russians display an exaggerated interest in the politico-military aspects of EU integration. Having just discovered the reality of the Union, they are too quick to look at it through the habitual prism. It is a serious misperception. Moscow would do so much better if it concentrated on the economic realities of the Union, and put its security aspect in the proper context.

Next to the fundamental political issues are institutional problems. It is time for Russia and NATO to pick up the pieces of their broken relationship. The Russians must realize that joint decision-making is not yet in the cards, and the relevant demand should not be allowed to block cooperation at the currently available level. Russia has singularly failed to use the potential of working its way into NATO that was contained in the 1997 Founding Act. The view of NATO as an appendage of the United States, or even shorthand for the U.S. in Europe, has not helped either. The ball is in Russia's court. It is essentially up to Moscow to assess its interests with respect to NATO, to decide what is feasible and what isn't, and devise a more realistic and pragmatic approach.

Above all, the Russians should make a fundamental decision of what kind of relations with the EU they want to have. They also need to make clear to themselves what they mean when they talk about "Europe". What is the meaning of this wider Europe in the 21st century?

In the century that begins, America is in no lesser need of allies, partners and friends than she was in the preceding one. America, however, is becoming increasingly self-centered, given to unilateralist temptations. Of course, the U.S. is not to withdraw into isolation, and will continue to be very much present and active in the world over, but it will not be able to achieve many of its goals without a capacity to build broad-based coalitions. Since many of the future challenges will come from Asia and the Middle East, not only Europe and Japan, the traditional allies, but also Russia, will become critical to success or failure of U.S. policies.

"Treating Russia as a normal great power", as U.S. Republicans put it, is not a panacea. In fact, it may be a recipe for conflict. The time is ripe to advance toward what may be termed gradual demilitarization of Russian-Western relations, and eventually constructing a new security community. The first installment along that path is clearing the obstacles described above (or at least managing them), whether in the Balkans, or with respect to missile defenses, or the general issue of nuclear arms and strategic stability. Parallel to that, there is a need to break out of the traditional Cold War security agenda and build patterns of cooperation in the new spheres – such as nuclear and missile proliferation, international terrorism, and drugs trafficking.

In the next round, Russia and the European Union could work to settle old conflicts on Europe's and Russia's periphery – as in Moldova and the South Caucasus. By the same token, Russia and the United States could work together to stabilize Central Asia and prevent the Afghan conflict from spreading beyond that country's borders, and eventually to help an internal political solution to that conflict, too. Europe could take the lead in helping Russia and America reduce their differences on Iran, and together they could facilitate Iran's re-entry into the international community as a responsible regional actor.

The issue of nuclear, biological and chemical arms proliferation, and the spread of missile technology will probably become more prominent in the next few decades, demanding joint and concerted action of America, Russia and the EU to prevent nuclear conflicts in Asia and the Middle East. This coalition, based on the supreme national interests of all three actors involved, could provide the prerequisites for the final move toward the formation of a security community embracing America, the EU and Russia.

At that stage fundamental changes will be required to eliminate the last vestiges of the adversarial relationships and harmonize the defense doctrines and security concepts of the parties involved. The threat of external aggression and nuclear war between Russia and the two factions of the West will be safely confined to the history books.

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