

Russian Foreign Policy Ten Years After the Fall

Robert Legvold, Ph.D.

Professor of Political Science
Columbia University

Too easily is it forgotten. We as Americans live in a revolutionary era; the Russians are consumed by it. Ten years after 1789, the French still had a fair amount of history to make and suffer, much of it under Napoleon Bonaparte, who had just arrived in power. So too the Russians' Bolshevik predecessors, who in 1927 had no idea of the vicious revolutions Stalin was about to impose. Considering the enormous upset Russia and its new neighbors have been through these last ten to twelve years and the distance they have yet to go before life becomes clearer, it should be no surprise that Russian foreign and security policy is not a settled affair. Nor should it be a surprise that Russian leaders have only partial and unsatisfactory answers to very fundamental questions, and that, as a consequence, policy remains a shallow, internally contradictory, poorly integrated enterprise, whose long-term thrust is predictable only to the foolhardy.

Thus, before rushing to judge the content of Putin's foreign policy, it is worth pausing over its condition. Ten years into Russian independence, the most salient thing about Russia as a player in international politics is the uncertainties. Russia, alone among great powers, faces two fundamental—indeed, primordial—questions. The first of which is, "Where do we, the Russians, belong?" It is really two questions: Where do we want to *be*—with the West, with China, or somehow on our own? And, who will have us? Second, and more *angst*-laden, "Who

are we?" Again, the question has two parts: Are we a country of consequence in the larger world or are we not? To the extent that we count at all, how do we count?

On the one hand, Russians, beginning with their national leadership, spend a fair amount of time assuring themselves that they are a great and important country. The official foreign policy strategy, announced June 28, 2000, refers to the Russian Federation "as a great power, as one of the most influential centers of the modern world," with a "responsibility for maintaining security in the world both on a global and regional level." Never mind how odd it sounds. It is hard to imagine the German or Japanese government preening in the same way. But the Russians feel the need.

On the other hand, they know their country's share of world GDP is now 1.5 percent, compared with the United States' 21 percent. We know they know because these figures come from an article written by the deputy director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs planning staff, which appeared roughly at the same time as the publication of the official foreign policy doctrine.¹ The manifestations of Russia's painful feebleness are numberless, and do not need to be listed here. Nor does the graveyard boasting square easily with Putin's anxious admission in his first state-of-union address to parliament two weeks after the doctrine's unveiling. Underscoring that the Russian population has been shrinking by 750,000 a year, raising the

possibility that "15 years from now there may be 22 million fewer Russians," he then went on, "If the present tendency continues there will be a threat to the survival of the nation." Not the normal condition of one of the "most influential centers of the modern world."

Still, to take Russian weakness as the reality they know and the boasting as the gloss by which they compensate would be to miss the genuine tension in the way Russians are struggling with the "who we are" question. They also are aware that, for all of its weaknesses, Russia matters to others for three reasons: the atom, the veto, and the location. Nuclear weapons and Russia's role as one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are straightforward reasons not to think of Russia as a garden-variety basket case. In addition, Russians realize that their influence within the post-Soviet space makes them very important to their neighbors, and, if the neighborhood is important to the larger world, so is Russia important. The Russian elite, beginning with the Russian president, quite consciously see their capacity to shape events in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and with Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova as key to their international standing. The uncertainty is over how to muster and deploy this capacity.

To further complicate the picture, the Russians choose not to define their country only in terms of its (missing) power, but also, in semi-ethereal ways, in terms of its normative impact. Undefined, as it usually is, it adds to their perplexity, but by it Russians want to believe that as a culture, even more fundamentally, as a civilization, Russia can and should exert an influence on the outside world. Perhaps this is only psychological balm for what Russia does not have, but even the most non-sentimental Russian politicians hark back to it often enough to suggest that it plays a role in their thinking. If so, however, it merely adds to their quandary. Not only are they at sea in translating this foggy sentiment into a practical idea, they full-well understand that Russian values cannot have an impact until those values are

revitalized, sold to their own people, and made intelligible to others.

So, Russia is unique among major powers, and we should be grateful. Only it starts without the elemental underpinnings of foreign policy. That is not good for anyone, and certainly not for the Russians. Yet, it would be much worse were Russia not the only major power without a clear sense of place and person. Indeed, a serviceable definition of a far more dangerous world is one in which two or more major powers have so lost their moorings.

The unanswered questions, however, do not stop here. Another set impinges directly on Russia's foreign policy choices. If the fundamental questions shadow policy at the deep emotional level, the second group of questions sets the terms for contemporary Russian foreign policy. To seek partnership with the West or not is the first of these. This is the practical version of the primordial question. It is not about identity, but about strategic choice, that is, about with whom Russia should align in order to advance its workaday interests. Tellingly it is not phrased in a neutral way, but in terms of the West. The other choices are derivative, and arise only as part of the leadership's (unsuccessful) struggle to resolve the question of their attitude, aims, and approach toward the West. The alternatives, all but one of which are hypothetical, are basically four. First, partnership with China, a choice that in the end depends far more on China than Russia. Second, partnership with China and India, a more impressive alternative, but momentarily still more out of reach. When a spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry raised the possibility yet again on the eve of Igor Ivanov's latest trip to India, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, who at the time was in Moscow, said yet again that China was not interested.² Soon so did the Indians.

The third choice is to make Russia the leader of the sizable number of states disaffected with the West, or, at least, its most prominent member. Responding to Samuel Huntington's concerns in his "clash of civilizations" argument,

Kishore Mabubani, currently Singapore's ambassador to the UN, once spoke of the clash between the West and the rest. Some Russian voices have toyed with the notion of Russia siding with "the rest." This is not Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's lunatic "southern strategy," by which he proposes aligning Russia with every outlaw regime from Iraq to Libya, but the gain to Russia is not a great deal more evident.

The fourth and final choice is much less hypothetical and very much within Russian control. I call it "fortress Russia." It is the option that Russian politicians return to regularly, when all else seems unavailing. Out of frustration more than preference, they imagine Russia standing on its own, eschewing alliances other than with former Soviet republics, marshalling its resources to defend its most vital interests, and focusing on regions close to Russia and key to those vital interests. While involving geographical retrenchment, it is not isolationism. Nor does it involve giving up great power aspirations. On the contrary, Russia would still bend every effort to make itself a country of consequence.

The westernizers among the Russian foreign policy elite, of which there are many, albeit of different stripes, will tell you that the choice is made. That Putin, notwithstanding talk of a policy that privileges no state or group of states, in effect a foreign policy *tous azimuts*, in fact deeply desires to draw Russia into the West, but, unlike the early Yeltsin years, on Russia's terms. His various references to Russia as a European nation and Russian culture as European, they say, are an invitation to be invited. So far, however, their claim appears to be a case of the wish being father to the thought rather than evidence that the issue is anywhere near resolved.

The second question fits within the first, rather like a *matrioshka*, the Russian nested doll. Russian policymakers and politicians are having great difficulty settling on the implications of U.S. global primacy. They know that at a visceral level they do not like it, but precisely what it means for Russia and what they should do about it remain a conundrum. The question is

linked to the first, because it greatly muddies the issue of the kind of relationship Russia can have with the West. Were Russia to reduce the West to Europe, what kind of a relationship can it have with the Europeans, if it has decided that U.S. primacy is insufferable and to be contested? Dare it think of the West in any way that does not feature the United States? As one Russian analyst has put it: "There can be all kinds of plans highlighting the Commonwealth of Independent States, Europe or China. They are all good but only as food for thought. Whether we like it or not, our possibilities in the rest of the world are largely determined by our relations with the United States."³ And most awkward, even if Russia chooses to resist U.S. preeminence, how does it go about it in a way that does not simply annoy Washington and display Moscow's impotence?

The outside doll of the *matrioshka* frames the other two questions. Russian leaders are also deeply confused about the very nature of the new world facing them. Is it essentially an economic world, and primarily about welfare, that is, the wealth of nations? Or is it still dominated by genuine security issues, ranging from the threats to national cohesion arising from within to the threats to national independence from without, threats that arise out of misshaped military balances and the use that others would make of military power?

Here enter the rambling, muddled debates about multipolarity and globalization. As soon as a majority of the Russian foreign policy elite decided U.S. primacy was bad (*circa* 1996), multipolarity became the common currency of debate. The debate revolves around three questions: Is multipolarity relevant—given the other powerful forces at work, including globalization? If it is relevant, is multipolarity a reality or a goal—an objective description of how things stand or simply a wish that Russia and other unhappy players might pursue? If it is only a goal, is it an appropriate and wise goal for Russia? Various Russians have different answers to each of these questions, but none of them—including, significantly, the president and

senior policymakers—apparently understands that they are a progression. Unless you answer no to the first question, you need to answer all three questions in order.

In the case of globalization, a topic that begins to rival multipolarity in Russian analytical circles, and slowly at the top as well, much of the discussion is about winners and losers and the threats that globalization poses. Few Russians, including national leadership, have begun sorting out the complex effects from its many subtle dimensions. The whole thing still looms as a large, inescapable, intimidating fog. As a result, they argue over whether it, and the essentially economic issues that it raises, should be given priority over the more familiar concerns of armed disorder and military disadvantage. In either case, however, the debates over multipolarity and globalization are both about what the outside world can do *to* and *for* Russia, and in neither case are Russian leaders at all clear.

When it comes to the whole *matrioshka* doll, while individual Russian commentators have their own answers to one or two of the questions, the regime does not. At least, those who articulate national policy offer nothing that looks like a judgment on which they are prepared to stake policy. Thus, compounding the disorientation that flows from fundamental uncertainties, contemporary Russian foreign policy, ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, has fewer rather than more answers to the questions that encase it.

Unable to answer questions that would give depth and coherence to policy, the Russian establishment substitutes a more united conception of threat, and there finds common ground on which to build. Beyond the permanent, core threat—namely, the enemy is within, for nothing threatens Russia like the prospect of domestic economic and political failure—three other components thread their way through official statements of foreign and security policy. First comes the unilateralism of the mighty, the mightiest of which is the United States. Call it the threat of unilateralism under unipolarity. Kosovo is the threat incarnate, but

Putin and his foreign policy team stress that the danger arises not from a single instance, but from a pattern of behavior.

As a result, the Russians, along with the Chinese, are the leading proponents of a "strict constructionist" interpretation of the UN Charter, especially of Article 2(7) and Chapter VII. For the same reason they speak often and emotionally of the "immutable right of the veto." And they cling to a notion of state sovereignty as a right, rather than as is increasingly argued by the West, a responsibility. This reflex has become their first line of defense against the perils of the United States doing what it wants where it wants.

They also, however, sense that, whatever may be the feeling of others about U.S. primacy, even U.S. allies often share their misgivings over the growing tendency of the United States to do what its leaders define as in U.S. interest without due regard for the opinion of anyone else. If they play their hand well, Russian leaders appear to calculate, joining or even helping to mobilize a consensus against one-sided U.S. actions may be a second line of defense. Beyond this, moreover, stands the temptation to think bigger; to play with the idea of actually balancing against the United States. Almost immediately, however, the Russians realize that they cannot do it alone, and no one of any importance is yet ready to throw their lot in with them. The idea dissipates in a meaningless haze of rhetoric.

The second formally agreed threat is the downside of globalization. As noted, none in the leadership has managed a refined or sophisticated notion of globalization and the precise challenges that it poses. They, however, have come to recognize, particularly since the financial crisis of 1998, that globalization punishes the economically weak, not merely the economically undeveloped. So, the state of Russia's economic health has become more than a matter of coping with the pressures within Russia. They also realize that the brutality of economic and other forms of globalization for countries at a disadvantage will depend on how self-pre-

occupied and ungenerous are the economically strong. About that, however, they are not quite sure what to do.

The third threat is from regionalization. It comes in two forms. First, Russians are acutely aware that most of the violence in this new world occurs within failed or failing states within regions that may or more likely may not be of pressing concern to international institutions capable of doing something about it. The trouble is that several of these regions are along Russia's borders. Second, the Russians worry, in sharp contrast, that at the base of an increasingly interdependent world the most powerful economic formations are regional trading blocs and, in some cases, such as Europe, regional markets. Regionalization of this sort makes little room for Russia, other than in the sputtering and uninspiring ties that Russia has with the decrepit economies of what were once sister Soviet republics. What connects the threat of regionalization to the other two threats is what the Russians are the first to recognize, although loathe to acknowledge: In all three cases the danger stems from Russia being left out.

Russia's unanswered questions, however, have additional consequences. Because Russian leaders either do not know how to resolve their underlying uncertainties or are not ready to try, they leave policy without a solid conceptual foundation. Putin and his colleagues make little effort to define the world in which they live and Russia's role in it. Their confusion or lassitude is driven home by documents like the June 2000 "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," which, rather than create a workable analytical basis for policy, strings together, slogan-like, a series of hopes and fears.

Lacking conceptual ballast, Putin's team is not in a good position to make strategic choices, and as during the last years of the Yeltsin era, they spend much of their time avoiding them. Thus, contrary to the alarm that one sometimes finds in the Western press that Putin is turning his back on the Americans and attempting to mobilize the Europeans against them or that he is getting ready to abandon a Western option

and push for a strategic alignment with China, the mark of Putin's foreign policy is the studious effort not to choose. This leads to the criticism widespread within the Russian foreign policy community that, despite Putin's whirlwind travels these past two years, Russian foreign policy is without a strategy.

The critics, however, overlook a dimension in which a considerable degree of coherence does exist—namely, at a tactical level. At a tactical level Putin has set priorities and pursued them with consistency. They begin with economics. Not only is foreign policy to be subordinated to domestic needs, as every Russian leader back to Gorbachev has stressed, but, under Putin, economic relations have received special attention. Since his election in April 2000, Putin has traveled constantly—from Austria to Cuba, Canada to Japan, Sweden to Vietnam, to Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, India, Poland, and Turkey. Everywhere he has worked at upgrading Russia's economic ties. In nearly all of the six high-level meetings held with the Chinese in the last two years, doing something about trade volumes that scarcely reach 1.6 percent of China's total trade, and most of that in commodities or low value-added products, has emerged as a high Russian priority. (This despite the fact that China and India account, in roughly equal shares, for 80 percent of Russia's \$4 billion in annual arms sales). In India, Putin pushed an elaborate program of scientific and technical cooperation, 150 projects in 17 sectors. Even in Cuba, a good deal of his visit was devoted to reinvigorating Russian participation in the Las Camaricas nickel-ore processing plant, the two oil refineries, and the Juragua nuclear plant. And so the story goes, whether with North or South Korea, Vietnam or Canada. Nowhere is this more evident than in Russia's thickening relations with Europe. In bilateral meetings—and Putin has met with Gerhard Schroeder five times in two years—or at summits with the European Union—of which there have been four—no topics have been more central than debt and energy, not even national missile defense. Even a mini-break-

through on the Northern Territories dispute at the April 2001 summit with Japan's Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori owed its inspiration to dreams of recharging Japanese investment.⁴

Within the overall pattern of Russian diplomatic activity, a second priority or pair of priorities can be discerned. First, Putin has embraced and extended Yeltsin's renewed attention to Russia's nearest neighbors. Not only has still more of his travel been within the region, including Uzbekistan, Ukraine, and Belarus, but a great deal of energy has been put into relations with all parts of the former Soviet Union. More than ever the instrumentality is economic, (although in Central Asia, in particular, the Russians have also stressed security ties in the face of what Islam Karimov and other Central Asian leaders perceive as the threat from Islamic extremism). While it is not easy to trace the precise connection between Gazprom or RAO-ESS, the national electricity combine, and official foreign policy, there is little question that the efforts of these and other Russian corporate interests to acquire large equity stakes in pipelines, refineries, power grids, and other strategically significant economic entities accord well with the Putin government's desire to increase Russia's economic influence throughout the region. And the methods have not been gentle.

In the outside world, Putin has invested heavily in developing relations with both China and West Europe, with slightly more effort going into the European relationship. Had the opportunity existed, it appears that Putin would also have worked the U.S. relationship hard. In its absence, however, he and most of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are content to court the Europeans. Russia's international economic agenda favors Europe, but it is also an important part of the relationship with China, including the not-always-comfortable issue of Chinese activity in the vast unpopulated reaches of the Russian far east.

China, however, far more than Europe, is central to a third tactical feature of Putin's foreign policy. Beginning with China, but now

including India, Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, and North Korea, not to mention Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia, the Russians carefully cultivate common areas of foreign policy concern. In communiqués and press conferences, they and their interlocutors tick off an impressive list of subjects on which they see eye to eye: (a) the threat of terrorism and separatism, (b) state sovereignty and the role of the UN, (c) notions of strategic stability and the U.S. National Missile Defense threat, (d) how not to deal with what the United States calls the "states of concern," and, of course, (e) NATO expansion. Beyond the public display of foreign policy "parallelism," however, the Russians have made only fleeting efforts actually to coordinate responses, and that only individually with a few countries and only for a portion of the list.

Finally, there is the aspect that Putin and his foreign minister stress on every occasion, Russia's new foreign policy pragmatism. As best one can judge, they mean by it that they intend to go about business in practical ways, curbing historical biases and ideological distractions. But it also has an operational context. As the foreign policy strategy says, Russia will pursue an "optimal combination of effort along all vectors." A less charitable interpretation would suggest that this is merely the echo of what many see as Putin's domestic *modus operandi*—the attempt to be all things to all people. Or, at a tactical level, the attempt to have one's cake and eat it too. To set about building relations simultaneously with China, Japan, and the United States, or with Iran and Iraq, or with India and China, or with Iraq, Cuba, and the like and the United States, without having to make tradeoffs or hard choices. It is, at the tactical level, ultimately another manifestation of the puzzlement at the root of contemporary Russian foreign policy.

Faced with a Russia that is but a broken shell of its former superpower self and, worse, disoriented and unable to make clear choices, many might argue that the United States would be wisest to stand back from the Russian problem, leaving the Russians to collect themselves, while

we go about more important tasks. When the Russians raise objections to U.S. policy initiatives, including the development of national missile defense or the departure from other parts of the arms control regime, they should be ignored. If they misbehave, the United States should come down hard on them. In neither case, do they have much with which to answer. All quite true: for the moment, they do not have many options, short of those certain to damage themselves far more than the United States.

Within the Congress and in some intellectual circles, another thought stirs on how the United States should deal with an enfeebled, uncertain, but still potentially troublesome Russia. While Russia is weak and unresolved in its identity, particularly in its attitude toward still weaker neighbors, the United States should work diligently to ensure that Russia makes the right choices: that it forswear imperial hopes and come to respect the independence of its neighbors; that it recognize the futility or, at a minimum, the dangers of attempting to build coalitions against the United States; and that it make its peace with a modern, democratic Europe whose economic institutions (the EU) and security structures (NATO) reach to Russia's borders. Those who favor this approach would have the United States engage in far more ambitious, even aggressive initiatives designed to reduce the security and economic dependence on Russia of countries like Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and, in particular, Ukraine. They would move NATO eastward as swiftly as possible, eventually including Ukraine and possibly states in the Caucasus. And, while they would welcome Russia's reconciliation with the West, they want it to be from a position of strength and entirely on the West's, nay, the United States' terms.

Its proponents are bound to be disappointed. Nothing suggests that the U.S. national leadership or public is in a mood to embrace, in any form, an ambitious policy toward Russia. More likely the inertia leading the United States to disengage from the Russian problem

in the last years of the Clinton administration will continue. The new administration inherits a policy that, looked at clearly, is now one of benign neglect: Russia is acknowledged, the lines of communication are kept open, and various cooperative projects are proffered as a sign of our good intentions, but little or no effort is made to struggle with the hard problems at the core of the relationship. The realistic alternative to benign neglect is malign neglect. If the relationship continues to deteriorate, the Bush administration, egged on by the Congress, will likely look for ways to punish Russia, but in a distracted and haphazard fashion.

The other tendency in the Bush administration's foreign policy appears to be a conscious or unconscious readiness to do without a Russia policy. More is involved than the predictable hiatus, while the new people formulate their thoughts. Rather than labor to develop a well-crafted policy that coordinates the many dimensions of the U.S.-Russian relationship, they seem more inclined to concentrate on a national missile defense policy, a Caspian oil policy, or a policy toward rogue states, each with a (disembodied) Russian angle.

Washington's waning attention to the Russia challenge is occurring for reasons that the advocates of the more ambitious approach rightly deplore. Russian weakness and the ambivalence of its leadership, many in the Administration and Congress assume, takes the United States off the hook. Correct as this perception of Russia's condition may be, the conclusion risks being historically shortsighted, perhaps dramatically so.

In at least three respects Russia could yet create serious, even grave threats to U.S. interests. First, an anchorless, insecure Russia, divorced from the West, will not be much of an aid in dealing with instability on the edges of Europe. On the contrary, were things to go very wrong in Ukraine, were Belarus's authoritarian regime to lose control, or were any of the unsolved conflicts from Karabagh to Transdniestr to re-ignite and escalate into something bigger, a Russia that had been cold-shouldered by the West

would more likely be part of the problem.

Thus, the troubled matter of Russia's relationship with the West has another side to it. Precisely how hard has the United States tried to open a Western option for Russia? The dreamy talk in some circles of one day including Russia in NATO fools no one, least of all politicians in Moscow. Russia will not enter the West or develop a partnership with it via membership in Europe's major economic and security institutions. But neither will a thin membrane of *ad hoc* special arrangements suffice to give Moscow a stake in a constructive joint approach to major security challenges in the netherworld between Europe and Eurasia.

Rather than the comparatively trivial agenda marking Russia's current relations with NATO, the United States and its allies in all contexts—bilateral contacts, EU summits, the Permanent Joint Council, even the G-8—should be engaging Russia in a serious conversation about ways to avoid destabilizing outcomes in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Caucasus. This should emphatically not be a case of the great powers again plotting over the heads of the locals, but rather a strenuous exchange leading to concrete complementary actions directed at eroding the sources of trouble. For example, some have suggested that Paris Club generosity on Russia's 2003 debt crunch be constructively reciprocated by a comparable Russian generosity on Ukraine, Georgia, and others' crushing debt burdens. There are dozens of avenues along which Russia and the West can coordinate actions to make this critical, unattended part of Europe a safer place—from policy toward Belarus's unreconstructed regime to enhanced multilateral security arrangements aiding settlements in the war-torn Caucasus.

Nothing of the sort is likely, however, if the United States decides, in half-thought-through fashion, that NATO in 2002 should take the next step, include Lithuania or all three Baltic states, and then worry about what comes next with Russia. Exercising restraint in order to build jointly with Russia a safer and more reassuring security regime for Ukraine, Belarus,

Moldova, the Caucasus, and ultimately the Baltic states is not to give Russia a veto over NATO decisions. The veto would be reality only if the West allowed Russia to insist on NATO's assurances before it proved its willingness to construct something better.

The second threat is a more active, extended, and palpable version of the first. Today's Russia is no match for the United States as a rival in any part of the world, save one—the post-Soviet space (not an insignificant exception). For some time, many within the Russian leadership have believed U.S. initiatives toward Uzbekistan, Ukraine and others, in the Caspian region on pipelines, and as part of the Partnership for Peace represent a concerted effort to outflank Russia and roll back its influence. So far, the Russian response has been spotty and half-hearted. While the United States has no reason to accommodate paranoid fantasies, it is not in the interest of the U.S. to inadvertently, let alone intentionally, spark a strategic rivalry with Russia in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and/or the western region.

Scheming on ways to engineer "geographical pluralism" in the former Soviet Union; subordinating energy policy in the region, particularly transport options, to strategic calculations; developing bilateral relations with Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Ukraine in plausibly anti-Russian respects; and carelessly or, worse, carefully planning military exercises designed for Russian scenarios invite a Russian reaction that could easily spiral into an escalating competition. The independence and security of Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the others remains an entirely legitimate U.S. objective. But everyone will be better off if this is pursued in ways enlisting Russia; not in the form of condominium, but by inducing Russia to see as its most productive recourse a national security policy based on ensuring the security of neighbors. Such will not happen, unless the United States takes seriously Russia's own security concerns.

The third threat is the least probable, but the gravest, and no longer unthinkable. The post-Cold War world will be a very different place, were two or more of the major powers to become alienated from the United States and

then join forces against it. While for the moment neither China, India, nor, for that matter, Russia have any desire to gang up on the United States, the convergence of three conceivable circumstances could change that. First, and most obvious, would be a mismanaged U.S. policy toward China. Were the United States to pursue containment early and aggressively, China's leaders well might decide the vaunted economic relationship is not worth the candle. That is more likely should a second circumstance prevail—should parts of Eurasia, including the Chinese borderlands, descend into disorder opening Beijing to collaboration with others capable of helping to control it. Enter a Russia that had its own reasons for disregarding U.S. concerns over how this was done.

Apart from attending intelligently to U.S. China policy and avoiding half-unconscious steps slowly but surely alienating Russia, the United States ought to think more about ways that it, together with its European and Japanese allies, can help damp down the danger of explosions in Inner Asia's great cauldrons (in particular the Ferghana Valley, Xinjiang, and Northwest Kazakhstan).

Given the humble shape of Russia and the think-small attitude of the U.S. Congress, executive branch, and much of the media, phrasing the stakes in these terms admittedly is not guaranteed to shake the prevailing mood anytime soon. Nor are any of these threats likely to mature during the next three and a half years. If the Bush administration chooses to carry on in the disengaged, scattered fashion of the moment, notwithstanding the rhetorical patina, it can do so, and probably without regrets. The regrets, if they are to be, come down the line.

Endnotes

1. Lev Klepatskii, "Foreign Policy Dilemmas of Russia," *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniye*, Vol. 46, No. 5 (2000), p. 83.
2. The idea was first seriously raised by Yevgeny Primakov, when he was foreign minister, on the eve of his December 1998 trip to India. The Russian was Alexander Yakovenko ("Igor Ivanov letit v Deli," *Nezavisimay gazeta*, April 29, 2001.) Tang's response can be found in PTI News Agency, New Delhi, May 3, 2001.
3. Viktor Kuvardin, "Does Growing Anti-Americanism in Russia Pose a More Serious Threat to the U.S. or to Us?" *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 12, 2001. Kuvardin is in Mikhail Gorbachev's circle.
4. At the Irkutsk summit, Putin re-embraced the 1956 agreement by which Russia agreed to return two of the four islands, Shikotan and the Habomais. Because the 1956 agreement is predicated on the conclusion of a peace treaty (which would have to include a resolution of the full territorial issue), the two sides are still far from an agreement.