

All the Way

Crafting a U.S.-Russian Alliance

Robert Legvold

RUSSIA AND the United States both stand on the verge of fundamental foreign policy choices likely to change dramatically their mutual relationship and, quite possibly, much more besides. For Russia, the choice centers on how thoroughgoing an alignment with the West it should pursue; for the United States, the choice centers on how thoroughgoing should be the independent assertion of its power. Choosing in the Russian case depends on how fully the leadership persuades itself, and then the Russian political class, that a changing international environment requires a change in the Russian approach—one that cuts free from habitual fears and addresses factors crucial to national welfare and progress. Choosing in the U.S. case has less to do with the elite's conception of international challenges than with the scope and methods of dealing with them. If the Russians make a dramatic *conceptual* choice, the effect on U.S.-Russian relations could be profound and positive. In contrast, if the United States makes a particular *strategic* choice, the effect on those relations could be major and negative, and the potential for a truly beneficial U.S.-Russian alliance may be lost.

Robert Legvold is professor of political science at Columbia University and editor of *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus* (The MIT Press).

Understanding why this is so and what is at stake requires a deeper look at what has happened to Russian foreign policy in the year since September 11, 2001. Dramatic as Vladimir Putin's instantaneous support for the United States was, and important as Russian cooperation in the campaign against global terrorism has been, it is the *basis* of this shift that should focus our attention. Putin's foreign policy is no tactical foray. Rather, he and his domestic allies have settled a critical ambivalence that plagued the country's foreign policy before September 11, one that had left Russia torn between competing images of the outside world.

Until then, for many within the foreign policy establishment and, it seemed, a part of Putin himself, the international setting remained a traditionally menacing place. It was a world where the state of military balances mattered; where the assertion of U.S. power constituted a challenge to be thwarted; where NATO's expansion toward Russian borders assumed first-rank importance, and its actions over Kosovo posed a direct threat; and where the virtues of a longed-for multipolar order served as standard mantra. Yet for others, including another part of Putin, the world was increasingly engulfed by globalization, and there, amid the tyranny of global capital flows, the refinement of trading agglomerations and

an information and communications revolution, the fate of Russia's own transformation would be decided. This was a place of geo-economics, not geostrategy; a place of arbitrage and export, not power plays and arms races.

It is this second world that President Putin now stresses, and thus it is clear in retrospect that his aligning Russia with the United States in the struggle against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban was but an eye-catching manifestation of a more basic strategic decision to throw Russia's lot in with the West. By so doing, Putin not only put an end to much post-Cold War uncertainty and equivocation, but also reconciled himself to what can only be a junior partnership with the United States—one in which Russia's ability to contest objectionable U.S. policies may be no greater than that of any U.S. ally, and perhaps a good deal less than some.

For those Russians still of the old view, Putin's concessions appear not merely misguided, but treasonous. In May, the leader of the Communist Party, Gennady Zyuganov, condemned a policy that "threatens the very existence of the country." In his angry recital:

Reliable allies have been sold out. Russian bases in Vietnam and Cuba vital for our country's security have been closed. American soldiers have appeared in Central Asia and in Georgia. Soon U.S. aircraft will land at the airfields of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The CIS and Russia have already been proclaimed as within the sphere of the U.S. vital interests. The strategic encirclement of Russia is being completed with the full consent of Mr. Putin and his team.¹

But Putin and his critics are ships passing in the night. Not only does the president no longer share even partially their view of the threats posed by the outside world, he has adopted an entirely different foreign policy agenda from theirs.

This is not to deny that Putin's new direction has roots in the period before September 2001 or to suggest that all his concerns over NATO, the U.S. nuclear posture or manifestations of U.S. unilateralism have evaporated. But it is important to recognize how different is the order of tasks on which he is fixed from that of two or three years ago.

Russia's New Agenda

V LADIMIR Putin's overriding priority is to synchronize his domestic and foreign policy agendas, which inevitably means featuring economics. Not by chance has the focus of Putin's last two "state of the union" addresses to parliament been devoted overwhelmingly to domestic issues, with only a few fleeting paragraphs on foreign policy—and even these few paragraphs have had mainly to do with economic issues. In this year's address, for example, he opened his comments on foreign policy by discussing the World Trade Organization and closed by stressing that "a fundamental feature of the contemporary world is the internationalization of the economy and society." Russia, he said, "no longer [has] a choice of whether or not to integrate into the world economic space."

This shift in priorities radiates throughout Russia's foreign policy, and has three critical effects. First, it diminishes the urgency and immanence of alternative preoccupations. NATO's evolution and activities lose their centrality; the massive U.S. military advantage, its imperious approach to designing the strategic nuclear regime of the future, even the arrival of U.S. troops on former Soviet territory, all loom less large; and the need to watch, catlike, for any encroachment

¹Zyuganov, "Our Defensive Shield Is Going into Ruin", *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, May 18, 2002.

on Russia's strategic positions in bordering regions shrinks.

Second, the reordering of priorities leaves room for Russians to rethink old assumptions. Rather than accent latent traces of U.S.-Russian rivalry—including a not-so-latent strategic competition within post-Soviet space—those of the new perspective emphasize instead that “Russia’s and the United States’ geopolitical interests don’t contradict each other; in fact, they tend to coincide.”² Looked at objectively, they argue, by bringing down the Taliban regime and forcing Al-Qaeda on the run, the United States did what Russia could not do for itself—reduce the security threat from its south. On other pressing security issues, too—the spread of weapons of mass destruction, fighting terrorism, enhancing energy security, or even stabilizing Russia’s northeast frontier in Asia—Russia and the United States have common interests that ought to lead to common endeavors. This is not just talk. The weakening of old fears and the incipient rethinking of security interests have already given rise to more constructive approaches to issues that once vexed U.S.-Russian relations. For example, the trade-off between the new NATO-Russia Council and a new Russian equanimity in the face of further NATO expansion would not have been possible if not for the shift in Russian attitudes that preceded them. Nor, almost surely, would the Moscow Treaty have sufficed to offset the unilateral U.S. abrogation of the ABM Treaty and its determination to do with its strategic forces as it chooses.

Third, because of the fundamental turn in Russian foreign policy, the basis for a radically different U.S.-Russian relationship now exists. In short, Putin’s new agenda permits a new and positive U.S.-Russian agenda. No longer, say partisans of the Putin approach, need Washington and Moscow concentrate

on preventing the negative; the two countries can now combine strengths to pursue a positive joint security agenda. After all, Putin rallied to the U.S. side so swiftly after September 11 not merely because he sensed an opportunity, but because he felt that his own earlier drumbeat of concern over international terrorism had been vindicated. Beyond the problem of terrorism, supporters of Russia’s new approach envisage the United States and Russia as partners managing what Dmitry Trenin calls “strategic stability” in the 21st century. This has to do less with the nuclear balance between the two powers and more with the need to counter “the growing danger of further proliferation of WMDs and their use in regional crises”, most of which are nearer Russia than North America. Trenin sees Russian-American cooperation in developing theater missile defense as part of this effort, and trends in official circles, too, are moving in this direction.³

Putin has also put energy partnership squarely on the new agenda. Beginning with a February 11 *Wall Street Journal* interview, he has stressed Russia’s potential as a reliable alternative to traditional Middle Eastern sources of oil and natural gas. Rapid movement in this direction, from the May Moscow summit through the Houston “energy summit” in September, reflects genuinely reinforcing interests. If its oil production goes from today’s 7.7 million barrels per day to a planned 9.5 million by 2010, Russia will need the U.S. market; and the United States, even were it to commandeer Iraqi oil fields, will need Russia’s help to stabilize international oil markets.

²Andrei Piontkovsky, “Problems for the Foreign-Policy Elite”, *Russia Journal*, March 15–21, 2002.

³Trenin, “Sealing a New Era in U.S.-Russian Relations”, *Moscow Times*, May 27, 2002.

Finally, Russians apply the word “partnership”, albeit somewhat more gingerly in this case, to evoke the two countries’ common stake in seeing China safely integrated into the international community. Some stress the importance of promoting China’s continued domestic evolution into a responsible and predictable actor on the international stage. Others focus on guaranteeing a strong Russian presence in its own Far East, lest Chinese power too easily flow across the border. But either way, addressing the challenge of China forms another key area of potential U.S.-Russian cooperation.

In this sense, the new arrangement between Russia and NATO is but a prototype of the relationship Putin and his allies have in mind. The promise of this venture owes as much to the new agenda being addressed as to the new mechanism by which Russia is to be included. In the struggle against global terrorism, the effort to control weapons of mass destruction and the management of regional conflicts—the heart of this new agenda—NATO, as both sides understand, needs Russia. The mechanism of the NATO-Russia Council, therefore, has an intrinsic value that its predecessor, the Permanent Joint Council, lacked, designed as it was to deal primarily with Russian discontents. Not surprisingly, therefore, “NATO at 20” in the half year of its existence is already off to a far more constructive start than the PJC. It is seriously at work on assessing terrorist threats, planning airspace management and joint training exercises, discussing problems of crisis management, considering theater missile defense, and coordinating efforts to secure fissile material wherever possible (as was demonstrated by U.S.-Russian cooperation in removing more than 100 pounds of enriched uranium from Serbia’s Vinca nuclear reactor last August).⁴

False Perils

WHERE ARE the obstacles to an effective Russian-American alliance? What could prevent President Putin’s preferences from carrying the day?

Three hazards, alone or in some combination, compose the typical answer. The first is opposition at home. Putin’s new course has been very much at his own initiative, and while he is supported by narrow though powerful strands of the political elite, skepticism remains among a broad spectrum of the Russian political and analytical community. Second, many have assumed that Putin cannot persist if his concessions are not reciprocated or rewarded by the U.S. side, and this, it is argued, the Bush Administration has failed to do. And third, others suspect that Putin himself endangers a far-reaching change in U.S.-Russian relations by mistakenly assuming that he can have his cake and eat it too: that he can pursue improved bilateral relations with the United States while continuing to cut deals with Iran, Iraq and North Korea that ignore important U.S. interests.

Dangers do exist, but not in these forms. Putin’s new course does face opposition at home, but deep-seated resistance to the essence of the policy is confined to increasingly marginal political groupings such as the Communist Party and pockets in the bureaucracy. Bureaucratic obstinacy, particularly in the military and among some in the foreign ministry, can nick the policy and distort this or that element of it. It is true, too, that support among a broader portion of the political class has been tepid, but this is not because its leading voices have a

⁴In this regard see Graham Allison and Andrei Kokoshin, “The New Containment: An Alliance Against Nuclear Terrorism”, *The National Interest* (Fall 2002).

better idea. Less do they object to the broad thrust of the policy than to specific aspects of its implementation.

Putin, however, so towers over the Russian political scene that little of this threatens to knock him off course, and he does have allies among the business elite and the key economic ministries. Only if Putin's general political position disintegrates will critics of his foreign policy have an opening, and that is only likely if Russia slides into serious economic difficulty. While not out of the question, economic trouble on this scale appears improbable any time soon.

The second concern—that the new policy will reap too scant an American payoff—ignores two factors: Putin has not framed the policy as a horse trade, but has made clear that he seeks a larger, overarching set of changes; and the Bush Administration *has* responded at this level. As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said in an October 24 interview, “The Cold War is over. The time now is one of cooperation between the two nations, not as it was of rivalry or competition.”⁵ The clearest expression of what the administration has in mind came in a June 1 speech by Richard Haass, the director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. “U.S.-Russian relations”, he said, “are of course still evolving from a Cold War relationship dominated by efforts to prevent what we could do to one another to a new post-post-Cold War one based on promoting what we can do with each other.” He emphasized that the “most important and challenging task at this stage is to define a long-term positive agenda for the bilateral relationship”, one that “has to be about more than eliminating old Cold War threats and fighting terrorism, important as those are. The relationship must be based on new opportunities for cooperation.” As to those new opportunities, Haass' list is not much different from the Russian list: energy coop-

eration, the economic development of the Russian Far East, cooperation in Central Asia, and what Haass termed “the large and demanding multilateral agenda” extending from “managing regional crises such as those in the Middle East and South Asia” to “transnational challenges such as HIV/AIDS, drugs, and human trafficking.”⁶

The third concern—that Russian maneuvering or double-dealing in its ongoing policies toward Iran, Iraq and North Korea will intrude—misconstrues this dimension of Russian policy. Russia's rapprochement with the West, historic as it is, does not and cannot mean that Russia will abandon its interests in relations with these three countries—or, for that matter, with China and India—just because they are not to U.S. tastes. But, if the argument here is correct, Putin will pursue these interests within the limits of what the traffic will bear in quest of his larger foreign policy objectives.

As a case in point, while Putin wants to protect long-term Russian economic interests in Iraq, including LUKoil's majority stake in the 11 billion-barrel Qurna oil field, and while he means to subject U.S. action as much as possible to UN Security Council oversight, he will not likely fall on his sword to prevent the United States from moving militarily against Iraq. Similarly, while Putin, the Ministry of Atomic Energy and the Russian domestic nuclear industry are eager to complete the \$800 million Bushehr reactor in Iran (and perhaps follow-on projects as well), they seem likely to insist on the return of spent fuel to Russia and the promised international inspection regime pursuant to those pro-

⁵Rumsfeld interviewed by *Valeurs Actuelles* (Paris), November 1, 2002, p. 35.

⁶Haass, “U.S.-Russian Relations in the Post-Post-Cold War World”, Remarks to RAND Business Leaders Forum, New York, NY, June 1, 2002.

jects. If Tehran balks, the deal may well come unglued. In sum, what might be thought of as “out of area” issues in a future U.S.-Russian alliance may well raise difficulties, just as such issues have often troubled NATO partners over the years. But if a common agenda conforms to core national interests on both sides, and if indeed national interest is the main currency of mutual understanding between Moscow and Washington, then these issues need not destroy the larger partnership.

Real Perils

IF NOT THESE commonly assumed perils, then what does threaten Putin’s new course and the prospect of a radically recast U.S.-Russian relationship? An initial threat arises from the impediments to Russia’s rapid integration into international economic institutions, but that is the easy part. Beyond that stand three vastly more formidable challenges.

As to this initial impediment, it is clear that Putin may struggle to find second gear. Entry into the World Trade Organization will require wrenching decisions affecting the economic interests of powerfully entrenched actors within Russia—indeed, whole industrial sectors such as aluminum, steel, civil aviation, food processing and pharmaceuticals. It will also require the revision of a vast range of legislation: as many as a thousand laws are at issue. Promoting Russia’s integration with (not into) the European Union promises to be still more difficult. At every turn, the process will involve potentially disruptive “two-level games”, to use the political science term, which is to say that national leaders will have to engage external and domestic parties simultaneously. Even a two-level game between the United States and the EU over, say, steel quotas, is fractious

enough—and that is when all players on both sides are familiar to one another and the game has long since been legitimated. When such players and games are neither familiar nor legitimated, it is likely to produce far less modulated political effects—as can already be seen, for example, in both the WTO talks and the Russian-EU dialogue.

Difficult as these processes will be, they are far less demanding than the three larger challenges at hand. The first of these concerns the fate of political trends within Russia itself. One need not share the bitter view of many Russian democrats that Putin’s turn toward the West rests on a Faustian bargain to appreciate how fast the idea of a deep and durable partnership with Russia will shrivel if Russia’s advance to democracy falters.⁷ The notion that Putin has rushed to the U.S. side in order to secure a free hand in Chechnya or a free pass from Western criticism in repressing civil liberties both claims too much and does too little to explain the shift in Russian foreign policy. Still, the basic issue of what Russia is to be, not merely what it wants to do, remains. The simple historical fact is that the United States does not have enduring alliances with major powers that are not democracies.

Putin’s notion of “managed democracy” does not turn him into a despot or even an autocrat-in-the-making; it only suggests that the ultimate foundation for Russian-American partnership is yet to be established. The communiqués that Putin and Bush sign speak of common interests and common values. Common interests there are; common values are yet to be fully demonstrated. In the meantime, frictions over human rights violations by an overzealous Russian intelligence agency,

⁷For an example of this view, see Dmitry Furman, “The Flight of the Two-Headed Eagle”, *Obschchaya gazeta*, May 30, 2002.

government intimidation of the press and media, and, in particular, brutality in Chechnya will undermine the sense of true partnership engendered by cooperation in other spheres. The alternative—Washington's looking the other way—would be worse, however. For the United States to soft-pedal Russian shortcomings in order to protect Moscow's cooperation in, say, the war on terrorism would implicitly, albeit unintentionally, derogate the very idea of a more substantial U.S.-Russian alliance. Democrats in Russia have long seen Russia's integration into the West as critical to eventual democratization in their country. But for Russia to *be* integrated into the West there must be convincing and sustained progress toward democracy. Putin, in his foreign policy, has gone a long way toward integration. Ultimately, however, if he means to complete the journey, his policies at home must be reinforcing.

The second of the three grand challenges cuts to the heart of the broad, basic foreign policy choice facing the United States. It has to do essentially with the ends to which U.S. power is applied, and the extent to which they incorporate or, alternatively, disregard the ends allies would have the United States pursue. Russia is no longer the focal point of the U.S. foreign policy agenda, and certainly the Bush Administration will not accord Russia a veto over critical American decisions anymore than it accords a veto to Germany or France. Nevertheless, as with other U.S. allies, how the administration sets its course, as much as what course it sets, will do much to define the limits of Russian policy. Much of the Russian foreign policy elite has come to accept that U.S. primacy in the first part of the 21st century is overwhelming and likely to endure. Most also believe that the Bush Administration will be ruthless in using its power—not against Russia, but against the states that it sees as immediate dan-

gers. Those states would be, first, Iraq, but then in short order Iran, maybe Syria, perhaps even Saudi Arabia (and, if things go very wrong there, Pakistan). Because they see Iraq as only a first step, they conjure up images of spreading disorder to their south; of outcast regimes redoubling their efforts to acquire nuclear weapons; and, coupled with U.S. determination to preserve unchallengeable military superiority, an intensifying U.S. military competition with China.⁸

Were such a U.S. policy to unfold, the strong tendency within this elite would not be to press Russia's leadership to take the lead, or even to join in directly resisting U.S. policy. Rather the push would be to stay clear of entanglement with U.S. policy to the extent possible, and here is where the problem would arise for Putin's new course. It is not that an unrestrained U.S. policy would render Putin's alignment with the United States untenable because of the domestic opposition it would engender; it is more that Putin himself would demur. Washington must therefore understand that the essence of the problem, as Russians see it, no longer arises so much from the fact of U.S. preponderance or even from its tendency toward unilateralism. The essence resides in the ends to which U.S. power is put and the discomforting sense that these may not serve Russia well. To the degree that the Bush Administration ignores this side of the problem, or reduces it to calibrating mere multilateral gestures against unilateral actions, it will constrain severely Putin's option of deciding in favor of a deepening relationship with the United States.

⁸See, for example, "Remarks at a Round Table on Iraq, Georgia, Bush Doctrine, and Russian-American Relations", *Mosfilmovskaya*, October 2, 2002 (as reported by the Federal News Service at www.fednews.ru).

The last of the three major perils rests at the conceptual level. It is inauspicious when the most elaborate and sophisticated—indeed, the only elaborate and sophisticated—assessment of a radically different U.S.-Russian relationship comes from the level of an assistant secretary of state. Haass' June 1 speech echoes the spirit of comments made by President Bush, Secretary Powell, Secretary Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice on various occasions, but none, including the President in his five meetings with Putin, has yet provided a conceptually coherent outline of the outcome America seeks. The Joint Declaration signed by the two countries at the May Moscow summit promises that "we are achieving a new strategic relationship." It commits the two sides to "cooperate to advance stability, security, and economic integration, and to jointly counter global challenges and to help resolve regional conflicts." But there is little evidence that the administration has a clear notion of this new strategic relationship, either of what its conceptual anchor or primary purpose should be or, therefore, how to define its success or failure.

The Core of Cooperation

THE NEW agenda in U.S.-Russian relations, constructive as it is for now, still falls short of its historic possibilities. Viewed in proper perspective, the evolution under way in Russian foreign policy, if fostered, opens the prospect of going beyond temporary cooperation all the way to a genuine alliance. The point is not a formal treaty, but a psychological leap by which each side comes to trust the other as an ally, to believe that on the most vital international issues they have a common purpose and that where there is disagreement, it is between friends, not opponents. It is a reach, but it is a wise reach.

If this idea seems far-fetched to some, it is, first, because the revolution occurring in Russian foreign policy is not yet clear to them, even as the suspicion of Russian double-dealing still looms large in the back of many peoples' minds; second, because so few have thought through what such an alliance would be about; and, third, because the new direction in Russian policy seems still fragile, appearing to be virtually one mortal man's work.

On the last score, were Putin gone tomorrow, the thrust of the new Russian policy would doubtless lose some momentum, but it would not collapse. Putin, after all, is not so much inventing a policy that transcends events as he is adjusting to realities that no Russian leader can escape. In the end, whether an alternative leadership would pursue an accommodation leading to a U.S.-Russian alliance depends more on the course of U.S. policy than on the vagaries of Russian politics.

So what might animate a U.S.-Russian alliance? The core focus can and should be stability and mutual security in and around the Eurasian land mass. This focus operates through three geographical lenses: Russia itself and its near European periphery; Russia's south; and China's western periphery.

First, as Alexander Vershbow, the current U.S. ambassador in Moscow, puts it: "Russia is the most important key to the stability of Eurasia", without which neither Europe nor Asia—two regions in which the United States has vital interests—can "be stable and prosperous."⁹ As long as Russia respects the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics, the United States has every reason to cooperate with Russia in stabilizing and aiding those

⁹Vershbow, "Russia, the United States, and the Challenges of the 21st Century", Remarks at the Moscow School of Political Studies, July 22, 2002.

states. In this regard, as well as others, alliance does not mean condominium; U.S.-Russian collaboration must not imply a readiness to decide matters over the heads of Russia's neighbors. On the contrary, an alliance's purpose would be to strengthen their sovereignty and vitality. A key example of the subtle way in which the revolution in Russian foreign policy makes this kind of alliance possible concerns Belarus. Putin's new agenda has led to a sharp cooling in Russia's relations with Alexander Lukashenka's regime. As a consequence, a leadership that flouts the values on which modern European security is based is increasingly isolated, the prospect of a Russian-Belarusian union has faded, and Ukraine's fears of encirclement have eased. Although not perfectly parallel, U.S. and Russian interests in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova now converge sufficiently to make promoting stability and successful reform there a matter of common U.S. and Russian ground.

Second, to borrow the formulation of Alexei Bogaturov, in the 21st century no longer is peninsular Europe or Northeast Asia the critical "strategic rear" of the United States, but the vast turbulent region stretching from eastern Turkey to western China and along Russia's south.¹⁰ As the United States girds to cope with the threats emanating from this area, no country brings more value as a potential ally than Russia. As things stand, the United States has backed into Central Asia with military power as part of the war against terrorism, and in the process it has offered quasi-security commitments to its new partners, almost certainly without careful consideration of their wider implication.¹¹ Central Asia forms the unstable core of Inner Asia; it is an area—the only one in the world—surrounded by four nuclear powers, two of whom recently teetered on the brink of war. It contains multiple points of friction—from

Kashmir to the Fergana Valley to north-west Kazakhstan to China's Xinjiang province. Each of these points is capable of bleeding into a larger conflict, and of strengthening WMD proliferation and terrorism. It is populated by regimes whose stability is universally suspect, and contains wealth—particularly in energy resources—that will make it increasingly important to both Asian and European consumers.

Not only are the United States and Russia directly but separately implicated in the stability of this region, but China is as well. This raises the third aspect of a U.S.-Russian alliance to enhance Eurasian stability. China will be a decisive actor in Inner Asia, not the least because it forms an integral part of the region. Unfortunately, China enters through its underdeveloped northwest territories, including Xinjiang—precisely where it feels most vulnerable. In part because of this sense of vulnerability, and in part because of the general state of Sino-American relations, China has not welcomed the arrival of American military power in Central Asia. On the contrary, while excusing a temporary deployment in the context of a war that it supports, China's leadership has opposed an extended U.S. presence there as an element of a hostile encirclement stratagem.

Russia and the United States have good reason to act jointly, not only to enhance their common stake in regional stability, but to draw China into a constructive dialogue over the role all three will play in Central Asia. Russia, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, is already engaged in such an effort. Talking to the Russians about U.S. military activi-

¹⁰Bogaturov, "Russia-U.S.: Is It Rapprochement or a Political Game?", *Vek* (May 2002).

¹¹Note A.J. Bacevich, "Steppes to Empire", *The National Interest* (Summer 2002).

ties in Central Asia (and Georgia) builds mutual confidence by promoting transparency, but it is not so far-fetched to imagine a far more ambitious trilateral dialogue among Russia, China, and the United States. Much as the United States and its European allies share assessments of threats at the edges of Europe, plan for coordinated action, and struggle to create the necessary machinery to carry it out, so can and should Russia and the United States do the same in Eurasia with Chinese participation when appropriate.

High Stakes

RUSSIA AND the United States allied against the new century's primary strategic threats, particularly those emanating from within and around the Eurasian land mass, would have much the same significance in the emerging international order as key U.S. alliances have had in the past. Even more so will this be the case if the alliance is underpinned by Russia's successful integration into the international economy and its safe passage to democracy.

Not insignificantly, movement toward alliance also has the advantage of blocking movement in the opposite direction. This is a rare moment in history. For the time being, and almost uniquely in the last three centuries of international politics, strategic rivalry among the major powers has disappeared. None of them defines any of the others as a primary security threat; none strains to amass military power against another; and none labors with alliances intended to thwart aggressive designs assigned to another. Given its weakness, Russia could not, even if it wished, turn itself into a global rival of the United States anytime soon. Within its own neighborhood, however, it is less disadvantaged. If events flow in the other

direction, if Putin or someone to follow decides that alignment with the United States is not worth the candle, this key region could be one of the first places where this historic blessing begins to fade.

It is not difficult to imagine what such rivalry could be about. An incipient jostling between the United States and Russia in the post-Soviet space began in the 1990s, complete with competition over energy pipeline routes and the mutual nurturing of alignments with favored states, leading in turn to the polarization of regional groupings (such as GUUAM and the collective security cluster within the Commonwealth of Independent States).¹² While these trends have dissipated, none has disappeared, and in some Russian quarters they simmer unabated, sustained by U.S. troops on former Soviet soil and the impending enlargement of NATO across former Soviet borders.

Additionally, without a great deal of imagination one can conjure renewed trouble over strategic military developments. This is and will remain a nuclear world. While U.S. attention is rightly focused these days on preventing outlaw states and groups from arming themselves with nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, ultimately the nuclear superstructure will be determined by the major nuclear powers. Currently, U.S. preponderance has permitted the United States to dictate the shape of the U.S.-Russian nuclear relationship, and Putin has prudently bowed to an outcome he cannot pre-

¹²GUUAM is the acronym for the joint undertaking among Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova intended to coordinate security and economic interests among these five states. Although Uzbekistan withdrew this past year, the group remains something of a counterpoise to Russian-led enterprises within the larger region.

vent. In the process, he and parts of the Russian security establishment are coming to accept the possibility of working with the United States and its NATO allies on the future role of missile defense.

But these are opening gambits in an ongoing process, leading in unknown directions—probably into space and the uncertainties that competition there will bring, and to a set of Chinese responses that will further complicate the Indo-Pakistani nuclear nexus and perhaps draw Japan across the nuclear threshold. The United States may for some time enjoy technological leads, permitting it by means of its own choosing to cope with the threats that lie ahead. In the modern era, however, history has been hard on states that assumed they could unilaterally impose a security order of their own devising and make it last. If, on the other hand, Russia is America's ally and not merely a reluctantly compliant foil, the United States would have much more leverage in designing a nuclear regime drained of competitive pressures among established nuclear powers, and thus more capable of circumscribing the behavior of new and would-be nuclear states.

In this light, it cannot be a good thing when Russians who are the strongest advocates of cooperation with the United States find it necessary to defend the Moscow Treaty by trumpeting effects that scarcely contribute to a more stable strategic nuclear regime. Sergei Rogov, for example, the director of the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada, praises the agreement for proving again that Russia remains the only nuclear interlocutor the United States deems worthy of engaging; for restoring Russia's MIRV option; and for exempting Russia's large store of tactical nuclear weapons from arms control at a time when, because of weaknesses in

conventional capabilities, "present Russian military doctrine puts much greater stress on nuclear containment than the Pentagon."¹³

MOVING the U.S.-Russian relationship to the level of a true alliance will not be easy, considering that the two countries have only allied three times in a century and a half, and then only briefly during wartime. Nor should the idea be embraced without eyes wide-open, weighing fully its implications and recognizing its requirements. The changes under way in Russian foreign policy, however, make such a relationship thinkable, and think we should, for the stakes are high. Consider how different the world would be in twenty years if a democratic and economically revitalized Russia is a genuine partner of the United States, addressing side by side fundamental threats to international comity and welfare. Consider how much safer the world would be if no great power is locked in strategic rivalry with another, and no combination of them is lined up against one or more others. And consider how much more successful the United States would be if its ends and methods are increasingly seen by other major players as wise and fair.

Whether any or some of this comes to pass will depend in no small measure on what is made of the current historic opportunity in U.S.-Russian relations. So, we are brought back to the fundamental choices facing Russia and the United States. We are about to see how far Russia is prepared to go toward a deep and lasting partnership with the United States, and how much the United States is prepared to do to make it possible. □

¹³Rogov, "Is It Surrender or Transition to Partnership?" *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie*, May 24–30, 2002.

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