

Vladimir Putin and the Re-Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy

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Throughout 2006, the world has witnessed the surprising re-emergence of Russia as an independent, assertive actor in world affairs. Beginning with Moscow's decision on New Years Day to stop gas deliveries to Ukraine (designed to force Kiev to pay market rates for Russian gas and, presumably, to punish it for the "Orange Revolution" and subsequent rush into the Western embrace), Russia has seemingly decided to remind the world that it still matters internationally. Subsequent Russian actions, including its continued support for Iran's nuclear program in the face of Western condemnation, its decision to sell anti-aircraft missiles to Tehran over Western and Israeli protests, and its invitation to members of Palestine's new Hamas government to visit Moscow while the US and European Union were busy cutting all ties to Hamas all show that Vladimir Putin's Russia is busy attempting to belie predictions made over the past 15 years that it was finished as a major international force.

The question remains—what accounts for Russia's recent international assertiveness? Certainly high global oil prices and a booming economy (with per capita income growing at nearly 10 percent a year for the past five years) contribute to this assertiveness. At the same time, however, it reflects more fundamental trends within the Russian bureaucratic and political elite, and a surprising degree of consensus within Russian society about the nature of Russia's role in the world. Moscow's ability to follow through on its geopolitical aims has no doubt been enhanced by the country's improved economic performance. Yet this observation still does nothing to explain the sources of Russian aims, especially since these aims do not appear to have changed much for at least the past decade.

Since the collapse of Communism in 1991, Russia has endured a confusing, often torturous process of self-definition. Stripped of the geopolitical and ideological certainties at the heart of Soviet politics, contemporary Russia has been forced to answer a series of fundamental questions about its relationship to the post-Cold War world system and its own identity as a state. No longer controlling an imperial hinterland in Europe and freed from a zero-sum relationship with the United States based primarily on the logic of mutually assured destruction, Russia in the early 21st century is in many ways a state in search of itself.

A major component of this process of self-definition has been the attempt to elaborate a new foreign policy vision befitting a weakened, but still formidable power confronting a world of emerging and uncertain threats. The formulation of a new Russian approach to foreign policy has continued unevenly since the last days of the Soviet Union when Mikhail Gorbachev first evoked the vision of a “common European home” stretching from the Atlantic coast to the Urals. Throughout the 1990s, Russian grand strategy remained in flux, as competing approaches struggled for preeminence under Boris Yeltsin’s unsteady hand. Only by the last years of Yeltsin’s reign had a general consensus had begun to emerge across a broad swathe of the political spectrum. Since his emergence from obscurity in the late 1990s, Vladimir Putin has pursued a strategic design that both reflects basic elements of this consensus and uses it to fashion a long term vision of Russia’s role in the world. Strengthened by high oil prices and a booming economy, Russia in 2006 has apparently begun implementing this design.

The most fundamental element in the foreign policy consensus shaped by Putin has been the conviction that, despite the momentous and often painful changes since the collapse of Communism, Russia retains the capacity to behave as a Great Power as well as an interest in doing so. Rather than base their country's security on the adoption of multilateral norms and institutions, the makers of Russian foreign policy have maintained a traditional understanding of security as a function of strength and independence. Consequently, Russian leaders see the threats confronting them as primarily geopolitical and military in nature, emanating primarily from other Great Powers. In comparison with the United States or the European Union, therefore, Russia assigns particular importance to state-to-state relations among Great Powers at the expense of transnational and sub-national threats. Even Islamic terrorism, which occupies a prominent position in Russian strategic thinking, is generally viewed as a subsidiary component of Russia's relations with other powers.

At the same time, this expansive strategic vision is constrained—significantly—by domestic political considerations. Strengthening the state, the economy, and the military are all prerequisites for Russia eventually living up to the expansive vision of Russia's role in the world that has emerged over the last decade. For the time being, Russian foreign policy is therefore likely to be conservative (in the sense of preventing any further diminution of Russia's global influence) while the process of domestic reconsolidation continues.

Russia's foreign policy under Putin therefore has emphasized tactical flexibility and caution as it seeks a breathing space to recover the country's strength. This strategy of seeking global stability and internal regeneration has many precedents in Russian history. It was adopted by Tsar Alexander II and Aleksandr Gorchakov after the Crimean War, and again by Sergei Witte, Pyotr Stolypin, and Aleksandr Izvolsky following the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution. These men and their ideas have been consciously adopted as models by a number of current Russian statesmen who see their own task in equally stark terms.¹ Stolypin even coined a term for this strategy—*peredyshka*, or “breath-catching.” For Putin, a man often likened to Stolypin and eager to reintegrate the experiences of the Tsarist as well as the Soviet era into Russian historical consciousness, the concept of strategic *peredyshka* appears to hold the greatest promise for bringing Russia back into the first rank of powers. Given the depth of Russia's decay since 1991, this task seems ambitious in the extreme. Yet Stolypin said he would need only 20 years to pull Russia out of the even deeper chaos of 1905.² Putin will have at least eight years (assuming he does not change the constitution and stand for re-election in 2008) and faces no danger as threatening as Imperial Germany of a century ago. If Putin succeeds, Russia a generation from now may well be both powerful and outside of an international order designed by and for the Western democracies. Although the success or failure of Putin's vision of Russian foreign policy will not be known for some time, it represents an ambitious and coherent vision that Western leaders would do well to take seriously.

A Brief History of Russia's Post-Soviet Foreign Policy

During the first years of Boris Yeltsin's presidency, it seemed that Russia had made a strategic decision to pursue integration with Western institutions, on the basis of a commitment to shared democratic values. Russia was even mentioned as a potential member of NATO. Unfortunately for the optimistic view that the end of the Cold War also signaled the "end of history," the process of integrating Russia into Western institutions encountered unexpected roadblocks. First, this rush into the West's embrace was rejected by a large segment of the Russian political class. The success of the anti-Western Liberal Democratic Party and Communist Party in parliamentary elections indicated substantial opposition to the foreign policy course adopted in the early 1990s.³ Moreover, institutions such as NATO had not themselves undergone sufficient transformation since the end of the Cold War and were in the mid-1990s torn between attracting Russia and containing it in the event that democracy failed. With no formal institutional mechanisms for managing Russia's integration with the West, Moscow often felt itself faced with a series of *faits accomplis* that it had no ability to influence. Even worse, Russia had difficulty articulating a convincing justification for deferring to Western leadership, since it had not yet developed a coherent vision of its own interests. To many observers inside Russia, the pursuit of integration with the West was less a strategic decision than an indication that Russia lacked a strategy entirely.⁴ In one now infamous and symptomatic exchange, then-Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev asked of former US President Richard Nixon "if you...can advise us on how to define our national interests, I will be very grateful to you."⁵

As the first Chechen war and NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe exposed the chasm still separating Russian and Western strategic priorities, Russia began freeing itself from Western influence. Even though this trend began while Kozyrev was still Foreign Minister, it became more pronounced when he was replaced by the ex-spymaster Yevgeny Primakov in 1996. Primakov declared that under his watch Russia would reject both the strident anti-Westernism of the Soviet Union and the naïve romanticism of the early 1990s in favor of an approach that would emphasize Russia's "status as a great power" and an "equal, mutually beneficial partnership" with the United States and Europe.⁶ What these concepts meant in practice was not always clear. Certainly Primakov and his backers rejected a subservient relationship to the West, but were less clear as to what other principle would serve as the foundation for their strategy, leading one Western analyst to lament that Russian foreign policy under Primakov "is difficult to define. It is difficult even to detect."⁷

If nothing else, Primakov's ascent changed the style of Russian diplomacy. It signaled the development of a cautious, non-ideological approach to foreign policy that was accepted by politicians and analysts from across the political spectrum. Under Primakov, Russian foreign policy emphasized economic development as a means of providing the state with resources to act independently. At the same time, despite some occasionally shrill rhetoric about NATO, beginning around 1997 Russia's role as a global power was gradually (and temporarily) de-emphasized in favor of restoring Russian hegemony in the Near Abroad.⁸ The idea of a strategic *peredyshka* began with this scaling back of Russia's global ambitions and focus on the economy.

The ascension of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in January 2000 helped consolidate this approach to foreign policy into something like a real grand strategy. Unlike Yeltsin, Putin has exercised a strong controlling influence on foreign policy decision making, downgrading the Foreign Ministry to essentially an executor, rather than an initiator of policy. If any single body in the Russian state apparatus can be said to be responsible for formulating and implementing a grand strategy, it is not the Foreign Ministry, but the Security Council (*Sovet Bezopasnosti*), which comprises the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defense Minister and Chairman of the Federal Security Service (FSB). The current chairman of the Security Council is Igor Ivanov, a professional diplomat and former Minister of Foreign Affairs. His appointment to head the Security Council in March 2004 reflects the council's increasing role in foreign affairs and consequent diminution of its domestic security role (among the previous heads of the Security Council, Sergei Ivanov's background was in the KGB and Vladimir Rushailo's was in domestic law enforcement).⁹

Particularly during the tenure of Igor Ivanov, the Security Council has been the main conduit by which information on national security affairs has flowed upward to Putin as well as the body charged with formulating official statements of strategic policy.¹⁰ Consequently, Russia's approach to foreign policy in the last several years has exhibited a greater consistency than in the Yeltsin years. By centralizing foreign policy decision making as a key element of what he terms "strengthening the power vertical," Putin has effectively removed discussions about the principles underpinning foreign

policy from the pressures of partisan politics. In exchange for a growing variety of economic opportunities, Russia's elite has largely accepted its exclusion from discussions on the nature of Russian grand strategy.¹¹ At the same time, like the Foreign Ministry, the Duma and its opposition parties have been effectively sidelined, leaving the Kremlin largely free to devise and implement its own strategic conceptions.¹²

Institutional and Strategic consolidation in the Putin Era

Even with Putin firmly in control, it has not always proven easy to distill the outlines of an overarching vision of Russia's relations with the rest of the world. In part, the lack of clarity has resulted from some deliberate ambiguity on the part of the Kremlin and the vagueness of official documents.¹³ At the same time, however, Russian foreign policy has often seemed passive, or at best, reactive. Yet the lack of initiatives on the global stage does not necessarily indicate the absence of a strategic conception of Russia's foreign relations. In fact, in this particular case, it more likely indicates the opposite. Given Russia's current weakness and social decay, the policy of prioritizing domestic reconsolidation and seeking a stable international order rests on a long-range vision of the world and Russia's place in it. Putin's goal of making Russia an independent actor in international affairs by strengthening the state and maintaining a congenial world order has the hallmarks of a true grand strategic vision.

This vision, moreover, is one that is shared widely across the Russian political class. Despite his ability to dominate the political and bureaucratic landscape, Putin's ability to proceed unobstructed in the field of foreign policy is to a large extent dependent

on his adherence to the general strategic consensus that has prevailed in Russia since the late 1990s. The foundation of this consensus is the notion that Russia is a Great Power, albeit a weakened one, with interests in many corners of the globe and a responsibility to look out for itself in a dangerous, indifferent world.¹⁴ Russia's elite is therefore inclined to envision its country playing a role in the world as analogous to that of the United States, rather than integrating with the less *realpolitik*-inclined European Union.¹⁵ Consequently, Russian foreign policy continues to emphasize the preservation of a system of international relations in which large states, working through the UN Security Council, are the primary upholders of global order. Beginning with Primakov, Russian diplomats and policy makers have repeatedly emphasized that, the end of the Cold War notwithstanding, Russia is still one of the primary pillars of the global order that must have an independent foreign policy, rather than an appendage of the West or a supplier of natural resources to the world market.¹⁶ As a corollary to this approach, Putin has been careful to preserve Russia's freedom of maneuver, never identifying too completely with either the "Westernizing" or the "Eurasianist" tendency in Russian political thought, but balancing between them.¹⁷

Official strategic documents, particularly the Foreign Policy Concept and the National Security Concept, reflect this understanding of the world. Although the importance of these documents should not be overemphasized—they are the work of bureaucratic horse-trading and are often left deliberately vague in order to satisfy competing constituencies—the language they use does provide some insight into how the men responsible for Russian national security view the world. More a guide to the broad

principles behind policy than a catalogue of responses to specific challenges, the Concepts define the mental universe within which policy decisions are supposed to be made. The current Foreign Policy Concept was drafted by the Security Council and adopted less than a year into Putin's term as president, in December 2000, replacing an earlier version dating from 1993. The present Concept lists as the first priority of Russian foreign policy:

“Ensuring reliable security of the country and preserving and strengthening its sovereignty and territorial integrity and its strong and authoritative position in the world community, as would to the greatest extent promote the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power and one of the most influential centers in the modern world is necessary to the growth of its political, economic, intellectual, and spiritual potential.”¹⁸

This statement, along with the Concept's subsequent desiderata (“shaping a stable, just, and democratic world order...[based] on equitable relations of partnership among states; creating favorable external conditions for the progressive development of Russia...”) is notable for the attention it gives to notions like “sovereignty,” “great power,” and “partnership among states.”¹⁹ The language of the Foreign Policy Concept is that of geopolitics—a world of states seeking power and pursuing their national interests, while subject to a balance of power. Such language, and such a worldview, would be unthinkable in official statements from the United States, much less the European Union.

The National Security Concept, confirmed by Putin just weeks after his ascension to the presidency in January 2000, further elaborates the ideological assumptions

underlying Russian foreign policy. It identifies two mutually contradictory trends as defining the future development of the international order. On the one hand, international relations in the post-Cold War world seem dominated by “the strengthening economic and political positions of a substantial number of states and their integration in a complicated mechanism of multilaterally directed international processes.” At the same time, however, this tendency toward greater integration and multipolarity is offset by “attempts to create structures of international relations founded on the world community’s domination [*dominirovanii*] by the developed countries of the West led by the USA and predicated on the unilateral—especially in the power-military sense—resolution of the key problems in world politics.”²⁰ The focus on states and power generally, coupled with the belief that Russia’s position in the world is threatened by the formation of a world order from which it is excluded are the basic tenets of what could be termed a “geopolitical” understanding of world politics. It is this paradigm that lies at the heart of the current Russian approach to foreign policy.

This understanding of how the world works has important implications for the way Russian foreign policy is actually conducted. Russia today emphasizes bilateral relations with other states, especially large state such as the US, China, and India, rather than multilateral pacts based on commitments to shared values. Russia prefers to deal with transnational problems such as terrorism within the framework of bilateral relations. Unlike multilateral forums, bilateral state-to-state relations have the advantage, from the Russian perspective, of avoiding the creation of intrusive behavioral norms while preserving states’ sovereign equality. Russia actively supports only those multilateral

organizations that, like the UN Security Council or the G-8, are essentially Great Power clubs that do not limit Russia's sovereignty over its domestic affairs (including, notably, Chechnya).²¹

Power is a necessary component of such state-to-state interactions, as it is only through the possession and ability to exert power that a state is capable of defending its own interests. While recognizing that the nature of power has changed since the end of the Cold War, an important component of Russian strategy in the short-term has therefore been to re-amass the attributes of power. Despite his desire for good relations with Russia's neighbors, Putin has been open about his intent to strengthen Russia as a prerequisite to adopting a more assertive role in the world. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly (Duma and State Council) in April 2005, Putin declared that "Ours is a free nation. And our place in the modern world, I wish to particularly emphasize this, will only depend on how strong and successful we are."²²

In concrete terms, the pursuit of power has meant seeking economic expansion and stability at home, as well as using the benefits for strategic purposes. In terms of economics, Putin has made conscious policy choices designed to stimulate and harness economic growth for the purpose of enhancing state power, though results have been mixed. In particular, although Russia has benefited from high oil prices over the last several years and a cheap currency in the aftermath of the 1998 ruble collapse, significant structural problems remain, including too many unprofitable factories kept open and an under-reformed banking sector. At the same time, oil and gas production have begun

leveling off (significant expansion would require massive investment to increase extraction from remote, inaccessible fields in Siberia), while capital flight remains substantial.²³ Nonetheless, Russia's GDP continues to rise, albeit at a slower rate than in the early years of the decade (the IMF forecasts growth of 5.5% for 2005, compared to 7.1% in 2004).²⁴

The economic expansion of the early 2000s has underpinned Putin's policy of strengthening the state by keeping government coffers full. The funds have been heavily spent on strategic initiatives such as reducing Russia's foreign debt and modernizing the military. Putin has used the windfall from oil revenues (transferred to the government by way of a windfall tax on high oil prices) to pay off Russia's international debt burden early, reducing foreign leverage over Russian policy. Moscow's debt payments to both the IMF and the Paris Club of sovereign creditors have proceeded ahead of schedule.²⁵ In keeping with its view of the world as an arena for Great Power rivalry, Russia has also moved to take advantage of its newfound wealth to substantially upgrade the military. Military spending, especially on conventional forces, has increased rapidly since 2003. The draft budget for 2006 authorizes an increase of 22% (668.3 billion rubles) over 2005 levels, which were already 27% higher than 2004.²⁶

The state takeover of the Yukos oil company in 2004 also appears to have been driven in large part by power-political considerations. Besides the oft-reported fact that former Yukos head Mikhail Khodorkovsky had been an outspoken critic of Putin and had been channeling significant sums of money to opposition political parties, it should also

be noted that Khodorkovsky was seeking to play a role perceived as threatening the state's ability to conduct foreign policy. Khodorkovsky had been heavily involved in lobbying the Kremlin over the route of a strategically vital oil pipeline from Siberia to East Asia and had been in negotiations to sell rights to oil controlled by Yukos to the American oil company Exxon-Mobil. The seizure of Yukos' main production unit, Yugansneftgaz, by the state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom ensures both that the Kremlin will have the final say over the pipeline route, and that foreign investors will be prevented from grabbing hold of an industry Russia considers strategically vital.²⁷ For the same reason, the Kremlin blocked attempts by a Chinese oil company to buy a stake in Yugansneftgaz after its seizure from Yukos.²⁸

Although Putin has been working domestically to shore up the bases of Russian power, Russia has pursued a surprisingly quiescent foreign policy under his watch. Russia has moved to defend its interests when they appear threatened, especially within the former USSR, but on the whole has not initiated any major diplomatic projects and has been largely willing to defer to the initiative of the United States even when American proposals appear to run counter to Russia's own interests. Paradoxical as this situation might seem, it makes sense within the context of a strategic *peredyshka* such as Putin appears to be pursuing. By avoiding quixotic struggles that he has no chance of winning, Putin increases the likelihood that his project of domestic renewal will be able to proceed uninterrupted.

Relations with the United States

Russia's relatively passive foreign policy has been particularly noticeable in its relations with the United States. Relations with Washington also provide the clearest demonstration of the state-to-state logic central to Russia's worldview. Under Putin Russia has accepted American leadership with less protest and fewer threats than in the Yeltsin-Clinton years, even though America has lately been less reticent about projecting its power. Russia's willingness to go along with US strategic initiatives (such as NATO expansion, the stationing of American troops in Central Asia, and withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty) appears based on a pragmatic calculation that Moscow has little direct leverage with Washington at present. When Moscow has been able to check the expansion of US influence at little cost—as when it cooperated with Beijing and Tashkent to end the deployment of US troops in Uzbekistan in the summer of 2005—it has not been reticent to act.

This approach reflects the Russian tendency to prioritize bilateral ties, as the Putin administration has often sought direct bargains with Washington rather than relying on multilateral regimes to rein in American supremacy. Russian leaders have been very forthright in condemning American hegemony as dangerous to world order, but have on the other hand repeatedly sought to cut deals over specific US policies with which they disagree and have little hope of changing. In the words of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, the state of relations between the two former Cold War rivals can best be characterized as “certainly not enemies but, probably, not allies yet.”²⁹

Without a doubt, relations between Moscow and Washington remain complex. There is little popular support for closer relations between the two countries in either the

United States or Russia; it has largely been because of Putin and Bush themselves that US-Russian relations have been reasonably close.³⁰ Pursuing a more productive relationship with the United States has in fact been one of the few areas in which Putin has actively spurned the societal consensus surrounding Russia's geopolitical priorities, and the suggestions of his own advisers.³¹ For this reason, Russia's present deference to America's international leadership is inherently unstable. Without Putin, there are no structural or political guarantees that Russia would not immediately (i.e. before reconsolidating Russia's domestic order) seek to play a more assertive global role.

Despite the disagreements that continue to exist between Moscow and Washington, the last five years have seen the emergence of a much more stable, predictable partnership between Russia and the United States, predicated on Putin's pragmatic acceptance of American primacy.³² Even in the first months after coming to power, Putin made it clear that, regardless of any specific disagreements, cooperation with the United States represented one of the key principles of Russian foreign policy. In a press conference with Bill Clinton during the latter's visit to Moscow in June 2000, Putin laid out his businesslike approach to relations with the US.

“We are intent on cooperation [*My nastroyeny na sotrudnichestvo*]. We are intent on reaching agreement on all problems that arise between us. Such problems, of course, exist, existed in the past, and probably will continue to exist. That is not what is important. What is important is that there can only be one approach to solving these problems. It cannot lead to the undermining of everything positive that we have recently achieved; it must be oriented toward the future.”³³

The 9/11 attacks provided a further impetus for Putin to seek a pragmatic relationship with Washington, free for the most part from the overheated rhetoric and bluster that often characterized the Primakov/Yeltsin era. Putin was the first foreign leader to contact Bush in the hours following the attacks on New York and Washington. Moreover, Bush's forceful response to the attacks is often seen in Russia as vindicating the hard-line approach that Moscow continues to pursue against Islamic radicalism in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Burdened by a seemingly endless war in Chechnya, Moscow readily concluded that "it is better to have Americans in Uzbekistan than to have the Taliban in Tatarstan."³⁴ Russian leaders recognized that, given the scale of the carnage unleashed on 9/11 and their own vulnerability to Islamic terrorism (Russia has over 20 million Muslim citizens and abuts some of the least stable of Islam's "bloody borders"), gaining the cooperation of the United States in the ongoing struggle against fundamentalism was enough of a strategic imperative to trump worries about the effects of American power inside the boundaries of the former USSR.³⁵ With the Taliban largely defeated and concerns about a long-term American presence in the region growing, Moscow joined the Uzbek and Chinese governments in calling for the US to leave the Khanabad airbase (as well as the Manas facility in Kyrgyzstan, which still houses US troops) in mid-2005.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Putin and Bush have repeatedly stressed their commitment to work in tandem to counter the threats posed by terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction while deliberately playing down areas of disagreement, including Chechnya and the state of democracy within Russia.³⁶ The broad strategic

cooperation that Putin sought with the US has been important in reducing the Russian tendency to perceive America's active foreign policy as inherently threatening. Indeed, according to Russia's ex-First Deputy Defense Minister Valery Manilov, the post-9/11 rapprochement between Russia and the US "is so valuable by itself that it can well compensate" for American actions that Russia vigorously opposes, such as withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.³⁷

Despite Putin's initiative in seeking better relations with Washington, serious disagreements remain. Moscow still worries about the effects of America's proclaimed support for spreading democracy and human rights throughout the world. Russian leaders and diplomats fear that democratization, particularly when imposed by American military force (as in Serbia or Iraq) violates the notion of state sovereignty central to the state-based world order that Moscow favors. In the words of Igor Ivanov, "the doctrine of humanitarian intervention and limited sovereignty deliberately presuppose inequality and a double standard among states."³⁸ Moreover, the Russian leadership resents what it views as the hypocrisy of an American approach that claims to uphold democratic rights, but in fact merely cements an international "oligarchy" of states subject to the United States while committing the same human rights abuses (e.g. bombing of civilian targets) it claims to be preventing. In particular, Russia also resents US influence in what it considers its own sphere of influence, i.e. the non-Russian republics of the former USSR, where Moscow itself continues to limit the sovereignty of its former dependencies.

In large part Russia's concern is based on fear of the consequences of America's unchallenged hegemony in the world. The Foreign Policy Concept, adopted before 9/11, identifies "a unipolar world structure dominated by the United States" as one of the major dangers to Russian interests.³⁹ Russia fears a unipolar configuration of global power for two main reasons. Most obviously, Russian leaders are concerned about their own loss of influence in the world. During the Cold War, relations between Moscow and Washington were *the* central issue in international politics. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has become one of many foreign policy concerns confronting the United States simultaneously, even as Russia's ability to check US actions (by mobilizing international opposition or threatening the US militarily) has virtually disappeared. Russia has therefore fiercely defended those institutions like the UN Security Council where, reflecting the Cold War balance of power, it retains a decisive voice. Russian opposition to the US bombing of Serbia in 1999, as well as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 had as much to do with defending the primacy of the Security Council as with a desire to preserve the regimes of Slobodan Milošević and Saddam Hussein. At times, Russian rhetoric on this score has descended into near-paranoid rantings about America's desire to neutralize Russia completely—one of the few instances where Putin has allowed himself to slip into the language of threat and recrimination often characteristic of the Yeltsin/Primakov years. Following US criticism of Russia's handling of the hostage crisis in Beslan in September 2004, Putin charged (implying the US) "Some would like to tear from us a juicy chunk. Others help them. They help, reasoning that Russia still remains one of the world's major nuclear powers, and as such still represents a threat to

them. And so they reason that this threat should be removed. Terrorism, of course, is just an instrument to achieve these aims.”⁴⁰

In addition to this form of direct threat, the Russian government fears suffering from the unintended consequences of American policy, especially instability around its borders resulting from the projection of American military force. This latter consideration is particularly evident in Moscow’s response to American initiatives within the borders of the former USSR. Even though the 14 non-Russian republics are fully independent states often resentful of their past subjugation, Moscow continues to regard them (excepting, for the most part, the three Baltic republics) as a zone of special Russian interest. At times claiming a Monroe Doctrine-like exclusivity around its frontiers, Russia has been eager to preserve the former Soviet area as a strategic glacis against threats emanating from stronger powers like China or regional instability of the kind afflicting Afghanistan and Pakistan. Given the importance of the former Soviet republics to Russian security, as well as the cultural and historical ties between them and Russia, it is unsurprising that Moscow regards instability in and around them with particular concern. Even beyond the onetime borders of the USSR, Russia generally opposes those actions of the United States that, like the invasion of Iraq, sacrifice stability to the promotion of moral and ideological values.

Despite its fears and frequent opposition to much of the substance of US foreign policy, Moscow has largely withdrawn its objections to specific instances of American unilateralism when it became evident that such opposition was not likely to have a

concrete effect on US actions. This pragmatic cooperation between Moscow and Washington has been most evident precisely where Russian opposition to US policy has been most stark: over the question of NATO expansion and over Washington's "interference" in the former Soviet republics that Moscow still considers its own sphere of influence. The outcomes of these disputes have provided the clearest evidence that, in contrast to his predecessor, Putin has come to terms with the consequences of America's dominance in the world.

Russia-NATO: Fruits of Putin's New Thinking

Russia consistently and firmly opposed NATO expansion (especially to include the Baltic states). As with its opposition to the US-led war in Iraq, Russian criticism was nonetheless tempered by the realization that attacking policies that Washington had irrevocably decided to adopt was subject to the law of diminishing marginal returns. Rather than allow these disagreements to undermine the foundations of US-Russian relations, as happened at times during the last years of Yeltsin's presidency (e.g. over Bill Clinton's decision to attack Serbia in 1999), Putin has successfully prioritized broad US-Russian cooperation over any specific issue in the bilateral relationship. Unlike his predecessor, Putin understands both that his political capital with the West is limited, and that Russia is no longer strong enough to compel Western powers to pursue particular policies.⁴¹

Post-Cold War relations between Russia and NATO reached their nadir in the last months of Yeltsin's presidency, after the Western alliance ignored Russian objections and

bombed targets in Serbia to stop the ethnic cleansing of the Kosovar Albanians. Primakov (then Prime Minister) turned his plane around en route to Washington, and a firefight between Russian and NATO troops very nearly broke out when the Russians seized the airport in Kosovo's capital Priština, denying its use to NATO forces. Moscow worried in particular about the possibility that NATO's decision to intervene in Serbia without UN authorization heralded a new era of Western disregard for international law and Russian interests. These suspicions were deepened by the adoption of NATO's new Strategic Concept in March 1999 that proclaimed the alliance's willingness to intervene anywhere in Europe in order to uphold stability and human rights.⁴² Even as the struggle for Kosovo was unfolding, Russia and NATO were at loggerheads over Russia's renewed war in Chechnya and the alliance's eastward expansion, which had recently seen the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland join, with the prospect of membership for other former Soviet Bloc countries, including the Baltic states.⁴³

Given the deepening mistrust between Russia and NATO, Putin's policy toward the Atlantic Alliance upon becoming president is particularly noteworthy. Despite skepticism regarding Western motives, Putin clearly indicated to his Western counterparts (in the face of opposition from his own government) that the admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO would henceforth be a non-issue in the alliance's relations with Moscow.⁴⁴ He moreover emphasized that Russia would not repeat its hysterical denunciations if NATO should decide to expand again in the future.⁴⁵ The new Russian president soon gave a more concrete demonstration of his determination to improve NATO-Russia relations. The NATO Secretary-General, Lord George

Robertson, was among the first foreign dignitaries scheduled to come to Moscow after Putin's inauguration. Over the objections of his generals, Putin refused to cancel Robertson's visit. Instead, Putin met personally with Robertson, and their talks led to the restoration of full relations between NATO and Russia.⁴⁶ In their joint communiqué, Putin and Robertson agreed that:

“Russia and NATO would pursue a vigorous dialogue on a wide range of security issues that will enable NATO and Russia to address the challenges that lie ahead and to make their mutual cooperation a cornerstone of European security.”⁴⁷

This cooperation in turn laid the foundation for the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, designed to institutionalize the cooperation between Russia and the North Atlantic alliance that developed in the aftermath of 9/11. The Council, which formally came into existence in May 2002, gave Moscow a permanent seat in NATO deliberations and has provided a foundation for continued businesslike relations even as significant disagreements (above all over admitting Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to NATO) have continued to exist. The Council has been instrumental in implementing joint planning on issues as diverse as airspace management, missile defense, and non-proliferation.⁴⁸

The improved climate in NATO-Russian relations under Putin is based on Russia's recognition that NATO is a fundamentally different organization today than it was during the Cold War. Putin conceded in a speech at NATO headquarters in Brussels in October 2001 that the alliance in the 21st century has largely ceased to be a military organization and had instead taken on an increasingly political role. If this evolution

continues, Putin said, “we would reconsider our opposition with regard to expansion.”⁴⁹ The alliance’s subsequent history, including its admission of the Baltic states in 2004, indicates that Putin was serious in proclaiming that NATO and Russia had crossed the threshold of a new era.

The Not-So-Great Game: US-Russian Relations in the CIS and the Case of Ukraine

Putin’s willingness to accept NATO expansion without is no doubt a significant development in the evolution of Russian foreign policy. At the same time, NATO’s transformation into a political club means that its expansion poses few genuine strategic risks for Russia. The US’s increasingly assertive role inside the Commonwealth of Independent States (including the deployment of US military forces in Central Asia) represents a more fundamental challenge to Russian *amore propre* and self-image as a Great Power. Consequently, the generally cooperative relationship that has prevailed between Moscow and Washington within the CIS is even more significant. Although rhetorical clashes continue to occur over US involvement in what Russia continues to view as its own sphere of influence, the overall pattern has been similar to the conflict over NATO enlargement—Russia has exerted firm opposition to the deployment of US troops in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, to Western “meddling” in Ukrainian presidential elections, and most significantly, to criticism of Russia’s actions in Chechnya, but has repeatedly backed down from the brink. The successful campaign to expel the US from the Khanabad base in Uzbekistan is but the exception that proves the rule; only when relations between Washington and Tashkent were at their nadir (because of the Uzbek

government's massacre of demonstrators in the city of Andijan in May 2005) did Moscow opportunistically step up its pressure to force the US detachment out. On the whole, in this most sensitive of regions, Russian foreign policy has again demonstrated Moscow's "geopolitical" vision of the world, and the concomitant recognition that preserving amicable relations with the United States should remain one of the guiding principle of Russian foreign policy.

The crisis brought on by Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" in the late autumn of 2004 provides one significant example of how Moscow has been willing to endure a "painful and humiliating" diplomatic defeat in order to avoid a full-blown diplomatic showdown with the United States.⁵⁰ The struggle for Ukraine began in the aftermath of a presidential runoff in November 2004 widely perceived as rigged (with Russian help) to ensure the victory of a candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, who would preserve a corrupt political order and diplomatic subordination to Russia. Thousands of disillusioned Ukrainians took to the streets demanding that the vote be rerun, and calling for the election of the pro-reformist, pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko. With Ukraine paralyzed by strikes and uncertainty, Putin and his subordinates began pushing, with increasing vigor, for the results of the flawed runoff to be accepted and for the pro-Russian Yanukovich to be installed as President of Ukraine. Putin met on several occasions with Yanukovich and incumbent President Leonid Kuchma to discuss strategies for transferring power. The Russian leader also repeatedly congratulated "President" Yanukovich on his "victory," while during the election campaign, the

Kremlin helped funnel money from Russian state-owned businesses to the Yanukovich camp.⁵¹

At the same time, the United States also had a political stake in the Ukrainian elections, with a wide range of official and semi-official organizations (from USAID to the International Republican Institute to George Soros' Open Society Foundation) providing money and expertise to the democratic opposition. Although this aid was designed to ensure a fair electoral process and was not given directly to any Ukrainian party or candidate, supporters of the Kuchma-Yanukovich regime objected, not without some justification, that US policies favored Yushchenko *de facto*.⁵² Given Yanukovich's commitment to keeping Ukraine in the Russian orbit and Yushchenko's call for closer integration with Europe, it was hardly surprising that the deadlock in November 2004 brought in its wake a diplomatic showdown between Moscow and Washington.

In keeping with the cautious precepts of Russia's current approach to relations with the US, the confrontation between Russia and the United States over the Ukrainian election did not advance beyond the level of hostile rhetoric.⁵³ Given Russia's still considerable leverage over Ukraine and the very real danger that a hostile Ukraine would pose to Russian interests, the most surprising aspect of Russia's response to the Orange Revolution is its restraint. Belying fears that Ukraine would split apart over the election, Russia did nothing to encourage separatism in the Russian-speaking East and South of Ukraine.⁵⁴ Furthermore, as the depth of the crisis in Ukraine, as well as the US and

European commitment to upholding the rule of law became clear in Moscow, Putin took the lead in seeking a graceful exit for Russia.

Yushchenko's own attempts to mollify Russian concerns played an important role in the gradual Russian climb-down. The Russian search for means of saving face was aided by a growing recognition that, despite the way their respective support for Yanukovich and Yushchenko had left Russia and the US at loggerheads, the objective bases for conflict were not that substantial. The Russian press, as well as some influential Putin advisors, voiced the fear that a Yushchenko-led Ukraine would rapidly join NATO, leading to the placement of NATO troops on Russia's southern border. As dangerous as the prospect of NATO troops in Ukraine could potentially be to Russian security, the Kremlin was slow to grasp two important facts—namely that the prospects for Ukraine joining NATO in the short-term were almost nil, and that the one factor capable of driving Ukraine and NATO together was a perceived Russian threat to Ukraine's independence.⁵⁵

The greater danger for Putin was domestic, with the consequences of backing down in the face of outside pressure still unknown.⁵⁶ The struggle for Ukraine between Russia and the US was in a sense less geopolitical than simply political, with Washington and Moscow drawn into confrontation because of their overlapping involvement in Ukrainian politics. Russia's Ambassador in Kiev, Viktor Chernomyrdin expressed the pragmatic realization driving Russia's eventual decision to accept a Yushchenko victory,

“Anybody who becomes Ukrainian president will be compelled to develop good-neighborly relations with Russia.”⁵⁷

A similar dynamic was visible in the crisis over gas supplies to Ukraine that the Kremlin unleashed in January 2006, when Gazprom cut deliveries to Ukraine in an attempt to force Kiev to pay full market price (Russian ally Belarus was still allowed to buy gas at heavily subsidized rates). Widely interpreted as an attempt to punish Ukraine for Yushchenko’s Western-oriented foreign policy, the Gazprom cut-off soon backfired. Since Russia is also the primary gas supplier for a number of countries in the European Union, and its existing European pipelines transit Ukrainian territory, it could not completely stop the flow of gas to Ukraine without choking off supplies to Europe as well. Instead, Gazprom attempted to continue pumping gas to Europe while stopping deliveries to Ukraine. Kiev promptly began siphoning gas from the pipelines to Europe, prompting howls of outrage from Moscow that it was stealing gas.⁵⁸ To Russian consternation, the US and EU backed the Ukrainians, charging Moscow with a deliberate attempt to pressure Yushchenko into abandoning his pro-Western course. The Russians quickly sought a way out, signing a deal with the Ukrainian government in mid-January providing for the gradual transition to market prices and ensuring the continued availability of Russian gas to Ukraine. By April 2006, Gazprom was even calling for Belarus to start paying market price for its gas.⁵⁹

A similar calculus is evident in Russia’s dealings with the other states of the CIS as well. While Russia’s residual influence remains strong in many (though not all) of the

former Soviet states, a persistent pattern of sacrificing such interests for the sake of relations with the US has emerged under Putin. Russia retains many levers for exerting control in the Near Abroad, including the presence of Russian troops in neighboring countries, encouragement of regional separatist (as in Transdniestria), and control of the oil and gas supplies of many CIS states.⁶⁰ In general, Moscow remains interested in preserving influence in the Near Abroad, ensuring access to the seas (especially the Baltic and Black) and transit rights for Russia gas and oil, and protecting the rights of Russian speakers who found themselves living outside their “homeland” following the collapse of the USSR.⁶¹

A combination of these factors has driven Russia’s attempts to sustain the Lukashenko regime in Belarus and the Akayev regime in Kyrgyzstan, as well as Moscow’s continuing intervention in the so-called “frozen conflicts” in Transdniestria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia’s policy in all of these regions dates back to the first years of post-Soviet independence, and it is a mark of Putin’s acceptance of new realities that he has overseen a gradual Russian withdrawal from several of these areas. In Georgia, whose Rose Revolution in 2003 set the pattern that Ukraine would follow the next year, Putin not only swallowed the installation of the pro-Western Mikheil Saakashvili as president, but also consented to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. The presence of these troops had been a major irritant in relations between Moscow and Tbilisi for years and had served as a lever for Russian interference in Georgian politics. Putin consented to their withdrawal with regret, but also surprising equanimity:

“Is it a good thing or a bad thing that we’re leaving Georgia? From the standpoint of our security and strategic interests, [these bases] do not present any particular interest. ... Politically speaking is it good or bad? I believe it is not very good because it means our military presence is no longer desired by our neighbors—and I don’t see anything good in this.”⁶²

Like the decision to withdraw troops from Georgia, Russia’s decision to accept a second runoff between Yanukovych and Yushchenko, and acceptance of Yushchenko’s ultimate victory, provides a basic demonstration of the principles at the heart of Russian grand strategy. The initial fear of Western influence and Western forces in Ukraine reflects the basic geopolitical mentality still fundamental to Russian foreign policy. Such spats, unsurprisingly, seem most frequent and most severe when they occur over former Russian outposts in the former Soviet Union. To a significant degree, the Russian leadership (and much of Russian society) remains accustomed to viewing the CIS states as a residual Russian sphere of influence. Indeed, the CIS itself, as well as other regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are in large part designed to maintain a degree of Russian influence over its former satellites.⁶³ At the same time, the eventual decision to seek a face-saving way out when confronted with concerted pressure from the West reflects the priority that Russia continues to place on good relations with the West, particularly the United States. While Russia continues to gather her strength for the future, serious conflicts are to be avoided, even over such strategically vital regions as Ukraine or the Caucasus.

China and the Development of Russian Policy in Asia

Relations with the West generally, and the United States in particular have long been the central concern of Russia's foreign policy elite. Moscow has become accustomed to the reality of US power and the need for a workable *modus vivendi* with its superpower rival. Confronting the emergence of China as a new force in world affairs represents a different kind of challenge for Russian foreign policy. Russia's decline over the last decade has coincided with China's rapid emergence as an economic and geopolitical powerhouse that, unlike the United States, shares a long land border with Russia and is not necessarily beholden to the international status quo. Managing relations with an increasingly powerful and potentially hostile China has provided a crucial test of Putin's reputation for pragmatism. Despite the uncertainty surrounding Chinese intentions and the inherent difficulty for a declining power of accustoming itself to a subordinate role, Russo-Chinese relations over the past five years have further demonstrated the logic underpinning Russian foreign policy. As in relations with the United States, Russia's approach to China has been characterized by a geopolitical understanding of the world, a preference for bilateral interaction between Great Powers, and a willingness to sacrifice Russian *amore propre* in the short-run to avoid being dragged into fruitless quarrels.

In many ways, an increasingly powerful China represents a greater threat to Russia's position than does an already powerful United States. Like Russia, China has often criticized the emergence of a post-Cold War world order dominated by the United States and underpinned by a commitment to "Western" values.⁶⁴ More so even than Russia, China is not a "status quo" power, but this shared unease with a US-dominated

world does not ensure good relations between Moscow and Beijing. China has never accepted the legitimacy of the “unequal” treaties imposed on her in the 19th century, including those that awarded vast swathes of Siberia to Russia in 1858 and 1860. At the same time, anti-Chinese rhetoric (much of it rather crude) is something of a staple in Russian politics, particularly concerning the danger of Chinese migrants swamping the sparsely inhabited territories on the Russian side of the border. Even Putin has expressed fears about Russia’s tenuous grasp of Siberia in the face of increasing demographic and economic pressure from Asia. Putin called in mid-2005 for stricter controls on migration to Russia’s under-populated Siberian and Far Eastern regions. According to the Russian President, “If we do not impose concrete conditions, the local population [of the Russian Far East] will in the future be speaking Japanese, Chinese and Korean.”⁶⁵ China is also the largest market for Russian arms exports, even as the Defense Ministry continues to consider China a potential adversary. While Russia is cutting back its nuclear force in line with the START-2 accord with the US, China (which was not a party to the START negotiations) is rapidly modernizing and expanding its own nuclear forces, and will likely reach parity with Russia within the next decade.⁶⁶

China is also taking advantage of its newfound economic and political power to expand its influence in Russia’s traditional sphere of influence in Central Asia. The SCO, in particular, benefits China by allowing Beijing to boost its exports and providing a mechanism for the participation of the Chinese military in regional security issues.⁶⁷ In general, Chinese activity in Central Asia has been steadily growing, both inside and outside the SCO. Chinese leaders have been increasingly drawn to Central Asia as an

outlet for Chinese investment, often overpaying for strategically important assets such as oil fields and pipelines.⁶⁸

At the same time, Beijing is taking steps to increase its geopolitical influence in the region. China has been the leading advocate of turning the SCO into a full-scale regional security organization (allowing Beijing to have a voice in the Central Asian states' foreign policy and to deploy troops throughout the region). China has proposed using the SCO to combat the rise of militant Islamic gangs threatening Central Asia as well as Chinese Xinjiang; Central Asian leaders have so far resisted what they fear is an attempt by China to draw them into its own orbit.⁶⁹ Even while seeking to expand its own influence in the region, China has, even more than Russia, been vocal about the need for US troops based in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to depart.⁷⁰

Despite the potential for Russo-Chinese relations to degenerate into a struggle for influence in Asia, Moscow has pursued a cautious policy of seeking to manage China's emergence. Given the growing power disparities between the two countries, the First Deputy Chief of Russia's General Staff Yuri Baluevsky is correct in observing that Russia has little choice but to have China "as a friend, neighbor, and partner, but never as an enemy."⁷¹ Russia has been seeking ways of building cooperation with China and tying together Chinese and Russian interests, even at the expense of allowing China a greater role in regional affairs (while also seeking to balance Chinese power through cooperation in Asia with potential rivals such as Japan, India, and the US).⁷²

Despite the very real fear of Siberia's sinicization, Putin has actively sought to draw China into Siberia, at least economically. China's economic influence in Russia will increase even further if Moscow follows through on its commitment, made personally by Putin to Chinese President Hu Jintao in March 2006, to prioritize a major new Siberian oil pipeline to Daqing in China, rather than a linked pipeline to the Russian port of Nakhodsk, across from Japan.⁷³ Because of Russia's interest in having good relations with both Beijing and Tokyo, the decision to deliver oil to China would be a significant indicator of Russia's priorities in East Asia. Of course, increasing China's dependence on Russia for its oil supplies will also improve Moscow's diplomatic leverage over Beijing, helping to counteract the growing power disparity between the two countries.⁷⁴

Moreover, given the severity of Siberia's economic decline (including a rapidly shrinking population), seeking investment and workers from China represents perhaps the only opportunity to prevent the region's complete collapse.⁷⁵ Indeed, economics play a central role in Russo-Chinese relations, especially as Russia is becoming increasingly important as a supplier of oil and gas to the growing Chinese market. Current annual trade turnover between the two countries is \$20 billion (much of which is in military equipment), but is expected to quadruple by 2010.⁷⁶ Moscow continues to seek the deepening of economic ties with China, despite the risk that Russia will become locked into a dependent role as a supplier of raw materials to the rapidly growing Chinese economy.

Moscow has also sought to deepen the political and military bases of Sino-Russian relations, though in fact the results have often been disappointing for Moscow. The need for political and military cooperation with China is necessitated by Russia's own weakness in Asia, resulting from Siberia's economic and demographic collapse, as well as the degradation of military facilities along the Chinese border that have been in place since the 1960s. On a tactical level, Sino-Russian cooperation has been increasing, with the two sides cooperating on border demarcation and technological standardization. China is also a major buyer of Russian military technology.⁷⁷ The growing cooperation between the Russian and Chinese militaries was formalized by the holding, for the first time ever, of joint maneuvers in late August 2005 involving over 10,000 soldiers. The exercises, dubbed Peace Mission 2005, are designed primarily to increase trust between the still wary Russian and Chinese militaries.⁷⁸

On a broader strategic level, Russian leaders have held up the option of a Russo-Chinese partnership as an alternative to Russia playing a subordinate role within Western organizations. For the most part, these calls for a Moscow-Beijing axis constructed on the basis of respect for state sovereignty and a multipolar world order have not proceeded beyond the stage of rhetoric.⁷⁹ China has openly declared its support for Russia's actions in Chechnya and Russia has unambiguously expressed its support for the "one China" principle. Yet these commitments carry little weight in practice because neither Russia nor China is likely to jeopardize its relationship with the rest of the world (particularly the US) over Taiwan or Chechnya, respectively.⁸⁰ When Russia has raised the possibility of a more formal partnership, Chinese leaders have been quick to discount the idea.⁸¹

Russia's difficulties in forming a stable relationship with China showcase the major problem with the foreign policy vision being pursued by Putin. Moscow's dealings with China in the Putin era do follow a similar pattern to Russia's relations with the West. Geopolitics has been at the center of Russia's China policy, with the content of Russo-Chinese relations centering on power (economic and military) and a struggle for influence, principally in Central Asia. Russia views China as a potential partner in constructing a multipolar world order even as a rising China is seen with a certain amount of trepidation in Moscow. Initiatives such as the SCO and the potential construction of the Daqing pipeline are designed to maximize Russia's leverage over China. At the same time, Moscow has taken the lead in solving problems, such as border disputes, that could lead to conflict in the short term while also loudly trumpeting a "strategic partnership" with China that Beijing remains reluctant to fully embrace. This eagerness to avoid conflicts is in keeping with Putin's desire for a strategic *peredyshka* while dealing with Russia's pressing domestic problems (which in many ways are most pronounced precisely in those regions lying along the Chinese border).

A strategy of stability and deference can be successful when, as with Europe and the United States, one's partners are essentially committed to the status quo. With China, such a strategy is complicated by the fact that that Beijing may not be content with the short term mutual non-interference preferred by Russia. At times, it seems that the Chinese prefer taking advantage of Russia's present weakness to extend their own sphere of influence, whether by seeking to penetrate Central Asia economically and militarily, or by seeking to establish control over Russia's export of raw materials.⁸² Beijing has also

been reluctant to accept institutional constraints on its ambitions, whether through the SCO or via the kind of vague strategic partnership that Moscow has repeatedly offered. Successfully managing the “rise of China” may prove to be the most difficult and intractable problem facing Russian diplomats in the immediate future.

Russian Foreign Policy: Prospects and Limitations

The strategy that they have chosen to pursue, seeking generally amicable relations with countries around the world (and focusing on the Great Powers) while seeking, in the long run, to ensure that Russia remains among the Great Powers herself, has the potential to again make Russia truly count in global affairs. However, much remains uncertain, not least the ability of Putin’s domestic reforms to successfully recreate in Russia the political, economic, and military bases of geopolitical strength. Though Putin’s diagnosis of Russia’s ills is undoubtedly accurate, whether the cure he has prescribed—a heavy dose of state intervention in the economy and “managed democracy” in politics—will prove effective remains open to doubt. Much of course will depend on petroleum prices remaining at their present high levels, since much of the Russian economic recovery depends on windfall profits derived from oil and gas sales.

To some extent, Putin is confronted with an impossible task of squaring circles. The kinds of reforms that would make Russia a respected ally and partner of the West, including a more open economy, free elections, and a recognition of the rights of states in the Near Abroad, are to a large degree predicated on the existence of a “post-modern” or “post-historical” (per Fukuyama) world where traditional geopolitical threats have ceased

to matter. The European Union, perhaps the supreme example of “post-historical” political thinking, has been the strongest advocate of Russia pursuing this path. The United States, which still faces some of the same challenges as Russia, has been more sympathetic to Putin, though still hesitant to embrace him fully. Putin’s emphasis on a strong state and strong military seem to indicate that the Russian president, like much of the Russian political class, believes that Russia still exists very much within history. Nonetheless, the Kremlin’s willingness to countenance pro-Western regimes in Kiev and Tbilisi shows that Putin understands that the nature of the Russia’s challenges today has very much changed since the end of the Cold War. Even if some dinosaurs in the national security bureaucracy and the military continue to believe that the West still poses a strategic danger to Russia, Putin himself appears to have come to grips with the reality that his country has more immediate and more threatening challenges elsewhere.

Yet it is important to note that Putin believes very much in the existence of strategic threats to Russia more generally, and that Russia’s current weakness makes it vulnerable. As Putin said in the aftermath of the Beslan hostage catastrophe in September 2004, “We showed ourselves to be weak, and the weak get beaten.”⁸³

The belief that Russia still confronts a wide array of “historical” challenges lies at the heart of Putin’s approach to the world. While Russian foreign policy has been largely passive over the past five years, there is reason to believe that Putin and his advisors view this state of affairs as a temporary inconvenience, a strategic *peredyshka* while Russia again marshals her strength to re-emerge as a Great Power in the future. Russia’s recent

actions, including its attempted interference in Ukraine (even if thus far unsuccessful), decision to continue supplying nuclear technologies to Iran, and recognition of the Hamas government in Palestine all seem to indicate that Russia's leadership views this *peredyshka* as a temporary condition that, thanks in particular to the oil and gas-driven economic boom, may be coming to an end. In the long-run therefore, 2006 may prove to be a turning point in the direction of Russian foreign policy.

Western policy makers need to understand that Russia's general quiescence on the world scene is therefore a strategic choice rather than a permanent condition, and be prepared to deal with an increasingly active (though not necessarily hostile) Russian foreign policy in the medium term future. Given that Russia's full scale integration with Western institutions and adoption of Western values appears unlikely, it is certain that disagreements, some of them significant, will continue to exist with Moscow.⁸⁴ The challenge for Western, especially American policymakers is to find ways for managing these disagreements.

This focus on domestic transformation means that preserving a global order both congenial to the directorship of Great Powers and acknowledging Russia as one of its indispensable poles will remain central to Russia's interactions with the rest of the world.⁸⁵ Because Moscow's attempt to reemerge as a Great Power is predicated on the existence of a world order in which being a Great Powers matters, the international corollary of Putin's domestic reconsolidation is to try to limit the evolution of the international security architecture away from a system based on power, state sovereignty,

and *raison d'état*. For this reason, Russia remains suspicious of multilateral regimes that limit state sovereignty—at least Russia's state sovereignty—or that posit the existence of a universal community of values. Indeed, most of Russia's quarrels with the West have resulted from perceived attempts to constrain Russia's ability to act as it sees fit or to impose "Western" values on other countries. Unease with an international order based on limited state sovereignty (at least for Great Powers) and spreading democracy has also provided Russia with a basis for cooperation with other powerful non-Western states, including India, Iran, and, most importantly, China—though relations with these states remain hampered by other disagreements.

Understanding the nature of Russian foreign policy under Putin is one of the key prerequisites for ensuring that the inevitable quarrels between Russia and the West do not degenerate into Cold War style zero-sum interactions. The hiatus, or *peredyshka*, that Putin has introduced into Russian foreign policy provides an opportunity for building trust between Russia and the West, since Russian global ambitions are less likely to come into conflict with those of Western powers when Russia has deliberately reduced its global reach. For Western (particularly American) leaders, the task is to demonstrate to Moscow that its present weakness is not being used to roll back Russia's influence in the world. The Putin era, like its predecessor, represents a transitional period in Russian history. In terms of foreign policy, the hostility of the Cold War has given way to a period of uncertainty which has still not reached an end. The ultimate strategic parameters of Russia's relationship with the West remain only partially defined; the actions of Western leaders as well as those of Putin himself will determine how those parameters eventually get codified.

Geopolitics and balance of power remain the key conceptual bases of Russian foreign policy. This understanding of how the world operates inclines Russian leaders to suspicion of the other Great Powers, whom they assume calculate their interests in a similar manner. Even though Moscow's repeated deference to American initiatives (such as NATO expansion) seems to indicate that Putin understands that the motivations of American diplomacy are not identical to those of, for example, China, there remains a strong residual tendency among Russian policymakers to suspect US motives. For the time being, Russia's economic and military weakness means that America can ignore those suspicions at little cost. However, it would be a dangerous gamble to assume that Russia will remain in its present state and that its concerns about a unipolar world order can be blithely ignored, especially as Russia already seems to be beginning to play a more assertive, independent role in world affairs. American policy needs to engage Russia, binding it to the world order that America is in the process of creating. The alternative is to risk Russia rejecting the legitimacy of a world order that has been created without it, much as Imperial Germany rejected the pre-1914 division of the world. Russia today retains the power to severely impede US initiatives within Eurasia should it choose to, and if Putin's domestic agenda proves successful, will probably have a similar capability on a more global scale within the next decade. Russia may never again be a military and political equal of the United States. Nonetheless, it would be foolish to ignore Russia entirely, or to assume that Putin's willingness to stomach unpleasant US initiatives like NATO expansion or interference in Ukrainian elections represents anything more than a temporary expedient.

NOTES

¹ Former Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov consciously identified his approach with that of Gorchakov, who served as Foreign Minister from 1856-1882, and was charged by Alexander II with rebuilding Russian prestige in the aftermath of the Crimean War. See Igor Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Nixon Center/Brookings Institution, 2002) 26-8.

² Of course, Stolypin got nothing like 20 years. He was assassinated in 1911, having been in power less than five years, and the First World War broke out a few years later. Nonetheless, many historians argue that it was precisely the success of Stolypin's reforms that forced Germany to go to war in 1914, fearing that if she waited, Russia would soon surpass her economically and militarily. See Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front: 1914-1917* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985). Also D.C.B. Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983). On the Putin-Stolypin comparison, see Dmitri Trenin, "Pirouettes and Priorities: Distilling a Putin Doctrine," The National Interest Winter 2003/2004: 77.

³ On the reasons for the surprising success of these revanchist groups in the elections of 1993 and 1995, see Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's Weak State and Weak Society: The Role of Political Parties," Problems of Post-Communism Jan/Feb 2003 50(1).

⁴ "Report of the Russian Working Group," U.S.-Russian relations at the turn of the century (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace/Moscow: Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, 2000) 59.

⁵ Quoted in Dmitri Simes, "The Results of 1997: No Dramatic Upheavals," International Affairs 1998 44(1): 28. A stunned Nixon replied that he would not presume to tell the Russian Foreign Minister what his own country's national interest was.

⁶ Leon Aron, "The Foreign Policy Doctrine of Postcommunist Russia and its Domestic Context," *The New Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998) 29-30. Aron identifies Primakov's vision of Russian foreign policy as a variation of Gaullism.

⁷ Michael Mandelbaum, "Introduction: Russian Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective," *Ibid*, 1.

⁸ Aron, "Foreign Policy Doctrine," 29-30.

⁹ For information on the Security Council's role and biographies of its personnel, see the organization's official website, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/index.shtml>.

¹⁰ Amina Azfal, "Russian Security Policy," *Strategic Studies*, Spr 2005 25(1): 68. This situation represents a major departure from the Yeltsin years, when the Security Council was subject to repeated turnover and was often ignored on key issues by Yeltsin and his administration. See "Report of the Russian Working Group," 59.

¹¹ Pavel Kandel', "Rossiiskie natsional'no-gosudarstvennye interesy i zauryadnye otechestvennye paradoksy," *Pro et Contra*, Aug 2001 6(4): 16.

¹² Dmitri Trenin and Bobo Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center/Endowment for International Peace, 2005) 9-10.

¹³ Pavel Felgenhauer, "Conceptual Indecisiveness," *The Moscow Times*, 26 Jul 2005: 11.

¹⁴ Russian analysts, even liberals, are generally keen to emphasize Russia's importance as an independent pole in world affairs. Vladimir Lukin, "Rossiiskii most cherez Atlantiku," *Rossiia v global'noi politike*, Nov/Dec 2002 (1): 103. Lukin, a former Ambassador to the United States, is a leading

figure in the liberal Yabloko party. See also A. Pushkov, "Quo Vadis? Posle vstrechi Putin-Bush," Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn' Jun 2002, 8-9. For a critique of this tendency to see the world in geopolitical, balance-of-power terms, see Paul Goble's essay, "In Moscow, Geopolitics is the Scientific Communism of Today," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Newline, 11 Aug 2005.

¹⁵ Trenin, "Pirouettes and Priorities," 80.

¹⁶ See "Primakov on Russian Relations with the West," OMRI Daily Digest, 30 May 1996.

¹⁷ Kandel', "Rossiiskie natsional'no-gosudarstvennye interesy," 20.

¹⁸ "Kontsepsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii," text from the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.in.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/0e9272befa34209743256c630042d1aa/fd86620b371b0cf7432569fb004872a7?OpenDocument>. An English version, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," is in Ivanov, 166.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Kontsepsiya natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii," text from the website of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/decree/2000_24_1.shtml.

²¹ Celeste A. Wallander, "The Challenge of Russia for U.S. Policy," Testimony to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 21 Jun 2005.

²² Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly," 25 Apr 2005, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029_87086.shtml.

²³ Clifford Gaddy and Fiona Hill, “Putin’s Agenda, America’s Choice: Russia’s Search for Strategic Stability,” Brookings Institution Policy Brief #89, May 2002. See also Opening Statement of Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr. to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations hearing on “U.S. Policy Toward Russia,” 21 Jun 2005. According to Biden, capital flight in 2005 may reach the equivalent of \$7 billion.

²⁴ International Monetary Fund, “Russia—Concluding Statement of the 2005 IMF Mission,” 6 Jun 2005.

²⁵ Russia ‘to pay Paris Club early,’ BBC News World edition, 3 Feb 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4233547.stm>.

²⁶ Valeria Korchagina, “Cabinet Set to Back Higher Spending,” The Moscow Times 18 Aug 2005: 1.

²⁷ Wallander, “Challenge,” Testimony to Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

²⁸ Alexander Koliandre, “Russia Keeps China Energy Options Open,” BBC News Business, 21 March 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4830768.stm>.

²⁹ Breffni O’Rourke, “U.S.-Russia: ‘Not Enemies, Not Yet Allies’—Ivanov, Rumsfeld Work At Intensifying Relations,” RFE/RL Feature, 16 Aug 2004.

³⁰ Andrew Kuchins, et al., *U.S.-Russian Relations: The Case for an Upgrade* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, 2005) 15.

³¹ V. Tret’yakov, “Pragmatizm vneshnei politiki V. Putina,” Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn’, May 2002: 19-20.

³² “Amerikano-rossiiskie otnosheniya: Programma obnovleniya,” Report of the Russia-Eurasia Program of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000: iv.

³³ Transcript of Putin-Clinton press conference, 4 Jun 2000,
<http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2000/06/28760.shtml>.

³⁴ The quote is from Gleb Pavlovsky, a high-ranking Kremlin political councilor. See “Kremlin adviser explains Putin’s decision to ally with West,” RFE/RL Report, 10 Oct 2001.

³⁵ Leonid F. Ryabikhin, “Rossiya i Zapad: sodержanie i perspektivy vzaimootnoshenii,” *Rossiia i Zapad posle 11 sentyabrya*, Materials from roundtable sponsored by Russian Academy of Sciences European Institute (Moscow: RAN-Institut Yevropy, 2002) 68-9.

³⁶ On the new rhetoric of cooperation and partnership, see the Bush-Putin summit declaration from November 2001, “Sovmestnoe zayavlenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii V.V. Putina i Prezidenta Soyedinyonnykh Shtatakh Ameriki Dzh. Busha o novykh otnosheniyakh mezhdu Rossiei i SShA,” 13 Nov 2001, <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2001/11/30514.shtml>.

³⁷ “Ivanov Lauds Foreign Policy Achievements,” RFE/RL Reports, 3 Jan 2002, 3(1).

³⁸ See Ivanov, 41-5.

³⁹ “Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii.”

⁴⁰ “Analysis: The Kremlin After Beslan,” RFE/RL Newline 8 Sep 2004. Importantly, such rhetoric has not been followed by concrete steps that would endanger the US-Russian rapprochement Putin has been pursuing.

⁴¹ Bobo Lo, “Integratsiya s ogovorkami? Rossiya, NATO i yevropeiskaya bezopasnost,” *Yevropeiskaya bezopasnost’: Sobytiya, otsenki, prognozy*, Report of the Institut nauchnoi informatsii po obshchestvennym naukam-Tsentr po izucheniyu problem yevropeiskoi bezopasnosti, Feb 2002 (3): 2-3.

⁴² Dmitri Trenin, “Russia-NATO Relations: Time to Pick up the Pieces,” *NATO Review* (web edition), Spr/Sum 2000 48(1): <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2000/0001-06.htm>.

⁴³ The Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—began membership talks with NATO in November 2002, along with Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria. All seven countries formally joined NATO in March 2004.

⁴⁴ In particular, Russia’s leaders questioned the oft-advanced notion that NATO expansion was a response to the threat of terrorism. As Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov wondered in 2004, “What actions could [NATO warplanes] take against Al Qaeda or the Taliban from [the Baltic]?” See O’Rourke, “U.S.-Russia: ‘Not Enemies, Not Yet Allies.’”

⁴⁵ Trenin, “Russia’s Foreign and Security Policy Under Putin,” 15.

⁴⁶ Trenin and Lo, “Landscape,” 4.

⁴⁷ “Joint Statement on the occasion of the visit of the Secretary General of NATO, Lord Robertson, in Moscow on 16 February 2000,” <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2000/0001-0c.htm>.

⁴⁸ Legvold, “All the Way,” 23.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Charles Grant, “A More Political NATO, a More European Russia,” *Europe After September 11*, ed. Howard Bannerman, et al. (London: Centre for European Reform, 2001) 50. See also

“Putin says Moscow may change view of NATO expansion if NATO changes itself,” RFE/RL Report, 4 Oct 2001, <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2001/10/041001.asp>.

⁵⁰ Dmitri Trenin, “Vneshnee vmeshatel’stvo v sobytiya na Ukraine i rossiisko-zapadnye otnosheniya,” Carnegie Moscow Center Briefing 7(2), Feb 2005.

⁵¹ Robert Coalson, “Analysis: Kremlin Wary of New Ukrainian President,” RFE/RL Feature, 24 Jan 2005.

⁵² Matt Kelley, “U.S. Money has Helped Opposition in Ukraine,” San Diego Union-Tribune, 11 Dec 2004. According to Kelley, the US government alone spent \$65 million on promoting democracy in Ukraine.

⁵³ Kuchins, et al., “U.S.-Russian Relations,” 1.

⁵⁴ Trenin, “Russia’s Foreign and Security Policy Under Putin.”

⁵⁵ Trenin, “Vneshnee vmeshatel’stvo,” 3. Of course, Ukrainian membership in NATO would not necessarily mean the physical presence of NATO troops in Ukraine. Despite having been in NATO for over five years, the former Warsaw Pact countries in Eastern Europe do not host troops from other alliance countries.

⁵⁶ Lilia Shevtsova, “Ukraine: The View from Russia,” The International Herald-Tribune, 9 Dec 2004.

⁵⁷ Anders Åslund, “Ukraine’s voters do not need Moscow’s advice,” The Financial Times, 11 Nov 2004.

⁵⁸ “Gazprom Vows to Restore European Gas Levels,” RFE/RL Feature, 2 Jan 2006.

⁵⁹ “Russia, Belarus on Verge of Dispute over Gas Prices,” RFE/RL Feature, 4 Apr 2006.

⁶⁰ Ariel Cohen, “Putin’s Foreign Policy and U.S.-Russian Relations,” Heritage Foundation Backgrounder #1406, 18 Jan 2001, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/BG1406.cfm>.

⁶¹ Sherman W. Garnett, “Europe’s Crossroads: Russia and the West in the New Borderlands,” *The New Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1998) 70.

⁶² Jean-Christophe Peuche, “Georgia/Russia: Base Deal Seen As Mutually Acceptable Compromise,” RFE/RL Feature, 31 May 2005.

⁶³ The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, encompassing Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, was formally created in June 2001 with a broad mandate that includes collective security operations in Central Asia as well as economic cooperation. See E. Wayne Merry, “Moscow’s Retreat and Beijing’s Rise as Regional Great Power,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, May/June 2003 50(3): 25-6.

⁶⁴ I. Ivanov, “New Russian Diplomacy,” 122.

⁶⁵ Quoted in “Ugroza po sosedstvu: Pered rossiiskim Dal’nem Vostokom vstaet real’naya ugroza <polzuchei> kitaiskoi ekspansii,” *Vzglyad*, 4 Aug 2005, <http://www.vzglyad.ru/politics/2005/8/42962.html>.

⁶⁶ Dmitri Trenin, *Russia’s China Problem* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999) 9-10, 27-31.

⁶⁷ Merry, “Moscow’s Retreat,” 25-6.

⁶⁸ The Chinese National Petroleum Company won a tender in August 2005 to take control of Petrokazakhstan, the largest oil company in Kazakhstan by paying far above market price, following a pattern of “overpay[ing] for assets; it’s more of a security issue for them than the absolute price.” See Keith Bradsher and Christopher Pala, “China Ups The Ante In Its Bid for Oil,” The New York Times, 22 Aug 2005: C1.

⁶⁹ Alexei Bogaturov, “International Relations in Central-Eastern Asia: Geopolitical Challenges and Prospects for Political Cooperation,” Report of the Brookings Institution Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, Jun 2004: 9.

⁷⁰ “China Seeks Closer Trade Ties With Central Asia,” RFE/RL Newline, 15 Jul 2005. “U.S. Says Russia, China ‘Bullying’ Central Asia,” RFE/RL Newline, 15 Jul 2005.

⁷¹ “Foreign Policy: ...And Experts Offer Their Own Views,” RFE/RL Report 24 Dec 2002.

⁷² Trenin, “Pirouettes and Priorities,” 80-1.

⁷³ “Russia’s Putin Confirms Siberian Oil Pipeline to Go to China First,” Moscow News, 7 Sep 2005, <http://www.mosnews.com/money/2005/09/07/siberianpipeline.shtml>. Following a long tug-of-war between Japan and China over the pipeline route, Moscow announced in December 2004 that it would build the main pipeline to Nakhodka in the Russian Far East, from where the oil would be taken by ship to Japan and Southeast Asia. At the time, Putin also said that a branch line would be built to the Chinese refining center of Daqing at some point in the future. In September 2005, Putin modified his position, saying that, while both the Daqing and Nakhodka pipelines would be built, the Chinese one would be completed first and would eventually receive around 2/3 of the oil delivered through the pipeline. In a summit with Hu Jintao in March 2006 Putin promised to build two gas pipelines to China, from Eastern and Western Siberia, and hinted that he preferred the Chinese route for the oil pipeline, though Moscow claims

that an accord with Beijing must await the completion of feasibility studies. “Putin hints at China oil pipeline,” BBC News Asia-Pacific, 22 Mar 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4831624.stm>.

⁷⁴ Vlado Vivoda, “Transitions Online: Russia & China: A Bear Hug for a Dragon,” 18 Jul 2005, <http://agonist.org/story/2005/7/22/62658/9569>.

⁷⁵ Vaslily Mikheev, “Vostochno-aziatskoe soobshchestvo: Kitaiskii faktor i vyvody dlya Rossii,” Moscow Carnegie Center Working Materials 2004 (1): 19.

⁷⁶ Claire Bigg, “Russia: Chinese Leader Meets Putin For Talks On Energy, Trade, Security,” RFE/RL Feature, 1 Jul 2005.

⁷⁷ Sherman W. Garnett, “Limited Partnership: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia,” Report of the Study Group on Russia-China Relations (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998) 14-5.

⁷⁸ “Russia, China Preparing For Exercises,” RFE/RL Newslines, 2 Aug 2005.

⁷⁹ Bigg, “Russia: Chinese Leader Meets Putin.”

⁸⁰ See Garnett, “Limited Partnership,” 12-3.

⁸¹ Robert Legvold, “Russia’s Unformed Foreign Policy: Ten Years After,” Foreign Affairs, Sep/Oct 2001 80(5): 63.

⁸² Of course, many Russians fear that Western institutions have the same ambition. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, Moscow has largely accepted the fact that NATO (for example) has become an

increasingly political rather than purely military organization. It is hardly possible to speak of such a transformation with regard to China.

⁸³ “Analysis: The Kremlin After Beslan,” RFE/RL Newsline 8 Sep 2004.

⁸⁴ Of course, the acceptance of Western values provides no guarantee against major political disagreements, as the quarrel between the US and Europe over the decision in 2003 to invade Iraq demonstrates.

⁸⁵ John Ikenberry defines order in international relations as the “basic organizing rules and arrangements” that govern the interactions of states, principally by restricting their freedom of action. These rules and arrangements are subject to collapse in the course of wars and similar crises, and are generally re-configured by the victors once the war is over. See G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001) xi, 3.