

The United States, Russia, and the New Challenges

NIKOLAI V. ZLOBIN

It is pointless to try to improve the legacy of the cold war. We need to create qualitatively new relations. By “improving” Russian-American relations, we are only prolonging the funeral of the cold war.

Today, the main challenge in Russian-American relations is the absence of an understanding of their foundations. Neither side truly comprehends the basis of their relations and their political philosophy. We need an intellectual breakthrough, a completely new understanding of Russian-American relations. One cannot form relations between the United States and Russia as an heir of the Soviet Union. Not improvement of old relations, but the formation of fundamentally new ones, should be the goal of the political elites of both countries.

The fight against terrorism cannot be the new basis for relations, since it is impossible to base relations on being against something. There is a historical example of “friendship against”: In World War II a common enemy brought our nations very close together. And yet after victory, they immediately pronounced each other to be the enemy and spent the next four decades preparing to fight each other. Nor can economic cooperation serve as the foundation—currently it is not adequate, and the difference in economic potentials is not conducive to parity. The legal procedures necessary for successful economic cooperation—from the protection of property rights to rules concerning dumping of goods or the transparency of financial transactions—are also missing. Even potential cooperation in the energy sphere cannot be the new foundation—for that to even be realized will require decades of hard work and billions of dollars in investment from the West, which it is not prepared to provide.

The formation of new relations between Russia and the United States will undoubtedly take place in a new and unique geopolitical situation. We are experiencing a rapid re-evaluation of the very foundation of the world order; the structure of international relations is changing; old institutions and blocs are falling apart; the concepts of allies, enemies, and partners are changing; the con-

Nikolai V. Zlobin is senior fellow at the Center for Defense Information, Washington, D.C., where he edits the *Washington ProFile* newsletter. He is also an executive editor of *Demokratizatsiya*.

cept of neutrality is disappearing; the leading players' conceptions of their national interests are rapidly evolving. Under these circumstances, each country tries to get as much long-term advantage and strategic political profit as it can. Between 1945 and 1947 the foundations of the political order were set for the following half-century; winners and losers were determined for decades. Governments and nations, political leaders and national elites, had to make the right decision in choosing sides. Now as then, no nation in the world can avoid making such a decision.

Both Russia and the United States are currently developing new foreign policy doctrines, which is not an easy task for either nation. After the collapse of the USSR, it was difficult for the United States to determine its national interests and priorities, and a number of foreign policy mistakes were made by the Clinton administration. These were not really mistakes, but rather inevitable side effects of a transitional period of foreign policy, foreign policy of a transitional character.

The new Bush administration also began by significantly underestimating the changes that had taken place in the world, in part because of a lack of new ideas. Out of habit, everything was based on a theory that until recently governed international relations—the concept that a unipolar world, a world with only one superpower, could not exist. It was maintained that, if one superpower exists, then another country, or a group of countries will inevitably begin to create another superpower, which will challenge the first one, bringing about parity. The entire experience of twentieth-century international relations corresponds to this concept.

Today, however, it is becoming increasingly obvious that no nation or group of nations can reach American proportions and begin a strategic competition with the United States, militarily, economically, or politically, within the near future. For the next few decades, the United States will remain the world's only superpower. This is a new situation. A certain unipolarity of international relations will be a strategic, long-term factor, regardless of the will and desire of the world's nations and their leaders or elites—including the United States itself.

Russia must presume that Washington will try to obtain the maximum long-term advantage from the current situation. It would be strange if it did otherwise. In its time, the USSR gained much strategic advantage from the situation that resulted from World War II. Yet awareness of national responsibilities and the cost of mistakes demands no small intellectual effort from the American and Russian political elites. The U.S. elite is far from ready for such a role, while the elites of other nations, and Russia in particular, are even less prepared for it. For the American leadership, the fight against international terrorism and the present-day dis-

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cussion regarding policy toward Iraq are good and genuine grounds for understanding their role and their responsibility for their nation and the entire world. A unipolar world has not existed in recent history; it is in many ways a confusing phenomenon that poses major challenges for the American and Russian governments as they try to formulate their foreign policy strategies. There is now a certain understanding of the nature of the new threats and active work on the formulation of new conceptions of both nations' national interests. Some elements are already apparent.

The first direction is the creation of a new system of international relations that would correspond to the realities of the contemporary world, and the institutionalization of those relations. The second is the fight against international terrorism and radicalism. Third is the formation of an international system to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and especially their acquisition by irresponsible governments and terrorist organizations. Fourth is the formation of a stable and predictable international market for energy, in which the buyers, and not the sellers, play a determining role. Fifth is the review of traditional international military and political alliances and the formation of new international institutions that can achieve foreign policy goals and stabilize the world. There needs to be a "zone of peace and freedom" in the world, not only within the traditional borders of Western civilization, as in the twentieth century, but also in new regions that may lack well-developed democratic systems; and not only with traditional allies, united on the basis of similar internal structures, but on the basis of matching foreign policy priorities. The sixth direction is the creation of conditions for a peaceful solution to any possible disagreements related to the situation in the Middle East, the Indian Ocean region, and China.

Washington and Moscow need to consider the new formulations of each other's foreign policies and decide to what extent the goals put forward by the other state coincide with their own. This is especially important for Russia. That President Putin made it clear to everyone that Russia no longer contends for parity with the United States and is prepared to be a junior partner to the world's only superpower can be seen as a highly intelligent move. It took too much effort and money to fight for parity, and Moscow still lost every time, sending its citizens on new loops of unnecessary disappointment, hurt, anti-Americanism and the heightened sense of inadequacy that is so difficult to overcome today. Being a junior partner to the United States is in no way insulting or demeaning. Most of the nations of the world were, or are, junior partners in the world arena—all of the European nations, for example. But they do not fall into national-patriotism. The difference in the potential of each nation is, as the Americans say, a fact of life. For Russia, Putin's admission of this is the result of the reality check of the contemporary world, of a pragmatic approach to the analysis of international relations.

Today there is a major asymmetry between Russia and the United States, not only in economic, but also in military and political potentials. Russia also needs America a lot more than America needs Russia. Strategically, however, Russia is a valuable and important ally for Washington. If not today, then in ten to fifteen

years, the United States will need Moscow's help. And if Moscow wants to successfully realize the foreign policy course chosen in September 2001, Russia needs to prove its strategic value for the United States. It must find and define the aspects of international policy and the regions of the world where Russia can be a useful ally for the Western world, above all, for the United States. It must concentrate its efforts where Russia can do something better than the United States; achieve results more effectively, faster, and cheaper than if Washington acted directly.

Russia will probably never be able to serve as an equal balance to America the way it did in the cold war years. In general, the concept of global parity and the concept of balance in international relations should be sent to the archives for a while. Russia still has many levers of influence in various parts of the globe, especially in the Eurasian region. In its new definition that region does not only coincide with the borders of the former USSR. It includes the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea region, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Far East, and so forth. In these regions, Russia traditionally has stronger historical and geographic positions than the United States and Western Europe, and on the basis of an "aligned agreement," it could work on solving problems and ensuring common interests. The list of such regions can change over time, but it is there that Russia can most fully and effectively fulfill its capabilities and potential.

Thus, while Russia cannot contend for parity on a global scale, in some regions of the world, it can be an equal if not senior partner to its Western allies. The deeper allied relations become between Russia and the United States, the wider the area of regional parity can become. If Russia chooses to represent and protect the interests of its Western partners in Eurasia, one can assume that they will, in turn, represent and protect Russia's interests in other regions of the world as long as doing so does not contradict their own interests. This is the plane to which relations between the White House and the Kremlin can be transferred: allied relations based not on agreements, but on the commonality of world views and value systems, and on unity of goals and priorities in international relations.

This reform requires significant work in replacing stereotypes in the thinking of Russian and American societies and in the behavior of elites. Most of the Americans who were questioned by the Program on International Policy Attitudes survey in August 2002 named Russia a potential enemy, along with China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and Libya. Russian anti-Americanism is even stronger. According to a survey conducted in August 2002 by the RosBusinessConsulting agency, 38 percent of Russians think that the United States is the nation that poses the biggest threat to Russia. China follows at 34 percent, Saudi Arabia at 4 percent, and Israel, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, India, and the European Union at about 1 percent each. That sentiment is generally similar in the Russian elite. The majority of the population in each nation still views the other as a potential military opponent—a considerable handicap to overcome.

Today, the policy of containment that governed international relations in the second half of the twentieth century is being replaced by a policy of engagement, involvement, and integration of nations to solve foreign policy challenges. Containment and confrontation are being replaced by the formation of blocs based on

foreign policy doctrine and priorities. At the center of the process is the United States and its fight against international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is the primary direction of the contemporary international political process, outside of which remain only the nations that, for ideological reasons, reject the foreign policy values offered by Washington and its allies in the fight against terrorism and weapons proliferation.

In that sense, neither the United States nor Russia has anything to gain from a weakening of Russia's position in Eurasia and Asia. Forming a real system of stability and security in the region and achieving predictability and reliability in the energy market are priorities for both nations. The myth that exists in Russia,

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that the United States is trying to drive a wedge between Moscow and the Asian region, to push Russia out of Asia, in no way corresponds to reality. On the contrary, Washington would like Russia to be its Eurasian ally and partner. Despite the importance of the westward direction, which is so important for Moscow, Russia must not go overboard

and lose the advantageous, and potentially even more advantageous, position in Asia—a position that the United States, regardless of its wishes, will not have for a long time to come.

One of the anti-terrorist coalition's central instruments for attaining its foreign policy goals is so-called limited sovereignty. The sovereignty of all state governments is considered absolute and untouchable, but only as long as the governments fulfill three conditions set for them by the international community: (a) Do not kill your people; (b) do not promote the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction; (c) do not in any way help terrorists, harbor, or support them. If sovereign states break those conditions, then, by the decision of international organizations such as the United Nations, they lose their right to sovereignty, and other nations can and should interfere. In this way, the world community must guarantee its security and fight against terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and human rights abuses. It is this concept that serves as the ideological foundation for the military action against Iraq being prepared by the Bush administration, or for the Israeli policy regarding the Palestinian Authority. From one side, the concept is largely based on Washington's purely political approach, but from another, it comes from the American missionary zeal, value systems, and morals. Moscow may or may not agree with it, but it must think realistically: The United States and its allies are completely capable of acting this conception out. If it remains outside the circle of allies, Russia could lose an important lever for influencing decisions.

The new system of international relations could also serve as the beginning of

a new, large-scale, strategic economic partnership—and not only between Russia and the United States. It is obvious, for example, that Japan is currently undergoing a long-term economic crisis, which, together with political and demographic crises, will exclude it from the top group of world economic leaders for many years. At the same time, Europe is uniting, and the day when the Old World will speak about international economics with one voice is not far away. Then international economics will not be reviewed at G-7 (or G-8) summits, but at some sort of G-2 summit: North America (United States and Canada) and the European Union.

Unifying economic processes will gradually begin to gather momentum in the Eurasian region. It is not unlikely that some country will gain enough power and influence to try to surpass Japan and begin representing the main economic and political interests of the region. China or India could, for example, become such a country. However, there is nothing today to prevent Russia from taking that role. Thus, the creation of an “economic troika”—a G-3 of the European Union, the United States, and Russia, which would represent the Eurasian/Asian region—could be a strategic goal. This is a highly ambitious idea, comparable only to the ambitions of the USSR in the second half of the 1940s. But let us recall that, at that time, Moscow received geopolitical advantages that allowed for the establishment of global parity.

When entering the contest for this economic role, Russia must be realistic about the challenges it will face. For example, today, no one in Moscow would decide to sell weapons or equipment to former Soviet satellites at “dumping” prices and help their economies at Russia’s expense. And yet that is what Russia expects from the United States and from the West as a whole. But no one promised to foot the bill for Russia—a nuclear power and a G-8 member. The United States does not even help its closest allies; on the contrary, it competes with them anywhere it can. Therefore, the only ones who can expect Washington to, for example, lower tariffs on Russian steel, redirect its energy complex to Siberian oil, forgive debts, or give up its share of the poultry market in Russia, are the people who have forgotten about the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the way in which everyone who gave or received this assistance was left with nothing.

Moscow regularly criticizes American policy only on two issues: Washington is either accused of being overly active and tenacious in getting involved in the affairs of others, or of being inadequately active and tenacious. One side is yelling “Yankee go home!” and the other side is yelling “Yankee come back!”

But does Russian criticism come with recommendations for alternative solutions for one problem or another? Someone needs to solve the problems. Is Russia ready to tell the Americans: “We know how to solve the problems; step aside, we will send our soldiers, we will invest our capital, we are prepared to replace you on this dangerous and thankless mission. And if we fail, we are prepared to accept responsibility and the possible consequences”?

In other words, if not Washington, then who? Moscow? It is easy to say that Russia is opposed to military action against Iraq. Many Americans are opposed to

it as well. But how do we stop Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction programs? No one has been able to do so over the past decade. Washington does not want Moscow's passive-aggressive Foreign Ministry rhetoric. It wants real help in solving international problems. The overwhelming majority of the American elite understand that alone the country can go too far, can fall into arrogance, lose sense of reality. The cure for this ailment is their amicable help. And Washington has a right to expect it from Russia—the only nation that, thanks to its recent history, can understand better than anyone else the challenges of being a superpower regarded by the rest of the world with jealousy, hope, and disappointment.