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“U.S.-Russia Relations after September 11, 2001”

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September 11, 2001 was one of the most tragic days in American history. In devising responses to the attacks of September 11th, American policymakers face difficult choices with uncertain outcomes. The war against extremist elements of Islamic fundamentalism that use terror as their main weapon will be new, protracted, and multi-faceted. The battlefield will appear in the strangest of places – in the mountains of Afghanistan, the mosques of Egypt, and the airwaves of Saudi Arabia. There will never be unconditional surrenders or clear military victories. Above all else, a new level of uncertainty about the tactics of war, the nature of the enemy, and the conditions of peace will haunt American decisionmakers and the American people for an undefined period of time. In almost all realms of international politics, the United States faces a new, more complex set of political, economic, and security, challenges after September 11th.

U.S.-Russian relations offer one bright counter to this otherwise gloomier international picture. Russian President Vladimir Putin was one of the first foreign leaders to speak directly to President Bush. In that phone call, he expressed his condolences to the president and the American people and his unequivocal support for whatever reactions the American president might decide to take. He then followed this rhetorical support with concrete policies. Though American and Russian armed forces had worked together successfully in Bosnia and Serbia in the 1990s, Putin’s pledges of support seemed to signal a qualitatively new level of military cooperation between these former _old War enemies. Some have even called it an alliance.

The potential to build a new foundation for Russian-American relations is great, similar to the window of opportunity that opened a decade ago in the wake of the Soviet collapse. To date, however, the expectations about a new future have vastly outpaced the actual concrete steps taken (or even outlined) to build a closer relationship between our two countries. We cannot afford to repeat some of the mistakes of the last window of

opportunity. We thought the Cold War ended in 1991, yet it is amazing how many legacies of that earlier era still linger today.¹ (And many of the lingering legacies have impeded our readiness for addressing post-Cold War challenges such as the threat we currently face.) Leaders in both countries must lead. They just act boldly, abandon business as usual, take chances, and use this moment to map the path to a new future.

The Record of Cooperation in the War against Terrorism.

On September 11th, Putin did not hesitate to call his new friend, George W. Bush, to communicate his full support for the United States and the American people. Putin did not let a decade of unfulfilled expectations in U.S.-Russian relations color his rhetorical response. While some leaders and people around the world believe that the United States ‘got what it deserved’ on September 11th, Putin expressed sympathy as a leader of a country that also has suffered from acts of terrorism against civilians in the capital.² Polls conducted immediately after the September 11th attacks demonstrated that the majority of Russian citizens also sympathized with the American people and considered the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon to be attacks on the entire civilized world.

Putin, however, did not immediately follow his rhetorical pledge of support with concrete policies of support. On the contrary, in the immediate days after September 11th, several senior Russian officials – including Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov – spoke openly against military cooperation with the United States to fight terrorism. It appeared that Putin was beginning to embark upon a pattern of decisionmaking that has now become routine in the Putin era. During previous moments of critical policymaking (be it economic policy, military reform, or foreign policy), Putin has allowed open disagreement between his advisors without coming down on one side or the other. At many of these critical junctures, Putin has avoided making the hard choice until a consensus opinion coalesced. If such a consensus did not form, for instance on military reform, then the initial push for policy change quietly stopped.

In foreign policy matters, Putin also has developed a habit of saying yes to everyone about everything without actually following up promises with actions. As one former senior official in the Clinton administration summed, ‘Yeltsin used to say no, no, no, when he really meant yes. Putin says yes, yes, yes, when he really means no.’

To help devise a plan of action for Russian foreign policy in the aftermath of September 11th, Putin retreated to his dacha in Sochi on the Black Sea and invited his

¹ A partial list of Cold War legacies still in place would include the following. Tens of thousands of American troops remain stationed in Germany, Russia’s army still deploys thousands of tanks on its Western border to defend against a NATO invasion, and Pentagon war plans still aims nuclear warheads on hair trigger alert at thousands of targets inside Russia. The main topic of discussion at meetings between American and Russian heads of state is still arms control. Perhaps most eerily, ten years after the end of Soviet communism and the birth of Russian democracy, Russia and “communist” China signed a friendship treaty and North Korea’s communist leader, Kim Jong Il, visited Moscow to reaffirm old ties and lay flowers at Lenin’s tomb on Red Square.

² It has never been proven who carried out the terrorist attacks that killed hundreds of Russians in Moscow and elsewhere in September 1999. Putin has stated repeatedly that Chechens carried out these attacks. The majority of Russian people believe him.

top foreign and security policy advisors to come down and consult with him. While Putin was in Sochi, Bush called him from his retreat at Camp David. After their forty-minute conversation, Putin seems to have made a truly strategic decision to offer concrete support for the new American war effort.

The following Monday, September 24th, Putin announced a five-point plan to support the American war against terrorism. He pledged that his Russian government would (1) share intelligence with their American counterparts, (2) open Russian airspace for flights providing humanitarian assistance (3) cooperate with Russia's Central Asian allies to provide similar kinds of airspace access to American flights, (4) participate in international search and rescue efforts, and (5) increase direct assistance –humanitarian as well as military assistance -- to the Northern Alliance and the Rabbani government in Afghanistan.

Some have interpreted these policies of support as nothing new or extraordinary. Of the five policies, the most dramatic change concerns Putin's acquiescence to American troops in Central Asia. Yet, even this policy might be interpreted as Putin merely reacting to hard facts on the ground. Through the Partnership-for-Peace program, especially as developed under Secretary of Defense William Perry, the American and Uzbek militaries have cooperated actively and often. While Russian armed forces protect the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Russia has considerably less influence on Uzbek defense policy for several years.

Nonetheless, Putin's pro-American plan was not simply tactical. Putin's policies of support, including his agreement to an American military presence in Central Asia, represented a significant shift in Russian foreign policy. Before September 11th, President Putin has vacillated between pro-Western and anti-Western foreign policy stances.³ In many ways, Putin own personal dual impulses of seeking at times to integrate into the West while at other times seeking to balance against the West reflect Russia's longstanding love-hate relationship with the West. In the wake of September 11th, however, Putin has seemed to lean much further towards the West and the United States in particular. (Before September 11th, Putin had placed relations with Europe as a higher priority than relations with the United States). His acquiescence to NATO troops in Central Asia signaled a reversal of two hundred years of Russian foreign policy. Under Yeltsin, the communists, and the tsars, Russia had always considered Central Asia as its 'sphere of influence.' Putin broke with that tradition.

Bush rewarded this supportive turn in Russian foreign policy two days later by changing the way he spoke about Russia's 'war against terrorism.' On September 26th, White House press spokesperson Ari Fleischer communicated President Bush's appreciation for Putin's statement. The White House press spokesperson also stated that the "Chechnya leadership, like all responsible political leaders in the world, must immediately and conditionally cut all contacts with international terrorist groups, such as

³ Putin pushed through the Russian parliament ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II, expressed a clear desire for Russia to become a fully integrated member of the G-8, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and, more generally, Europe, and has stressed in his new foreign policy doctrine that "Russia shall actively work to attract foreign investments," and will endeavor "to ensure favorable external conditions for forming a market-oriented economy in our country." At the same time, Putin also has reached out to North Korea, Cuba, and China, and signed a major arms deal with Iran.

Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda organization.”⁴ The Clinton Administration had previously connected some Chechen fighters to bin Laden’s network.⁵ The Bush Administration had not.

President Bush’s statement did not give Putin a green light to do what they wanted in Chechnya. For the past two years, the Russian armed forces already have done whatever they wanted in Chechnya with little or no reference to American opinions. Before September 11th, the Bush Administration had not made Chechnya a top priority in its policy towards Russia. The statement of support, however, did underscore the notion that the United States and Russia faced a common enemy. Putin had been pushing this theme for two years with his American counterparts. Putin was pleased to hear that President Bush finally recognized publicly their common cause.

Domestic Resistance to Putin’s Pro-American Lean

In deciding to make concrete policy changes to reflect his rhetorical support for the American war against terrorism, Putin has acted against the preferences of many important constituencies within Russia. Publicly, direct criticism of Putin has been limited. After all, Putin still enjoys tremendous popularity, making it unwise politically to speak out against him. Below the surface, however, there are subtle signs of discontent with Putin’s new support for American military action in Russia’s own backyard.

The military, first and foremost, cannot be happy about NATO troops in Central Asia. Uzbek President Islam Karimov has hinted that he would like to see the American armed forces stay in Uzbekistan for an indefinite period of time to help protect Uzbekistan from terrorists, and though never stated publicly, the Russians. American troops have demonstrated a pattern of staying in places well after the fighting has ended. For Russian military officers still fighting the last war – the Cold War – the thought of American troops based permanently in a former Soviet republic must be horrifying, especially in a place as strategic and anti-Russian as Uzbekistan.

Second, the intelligence services, including Putin’s own alma mater, the KGB (now called the FSB) do not welcome the new alliance. Putin’s Minister of Defense and former KGB general, Sergei Ivanov, has reversed his earlier remarks and pledged support for Putin’s position. Nonetheless, many Russian observers believe that Ivanov could become the focal point of opposition to Putin within the government should the pro-American policy adopted by Putin not yield results.

Third, the military industrial complex does not welcome the new Western orientation. These companies enjoy contracts with American enemies such as Iran and

⁴ White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer, White House Briefing, September 26, 2001.

⁵ According to Ambassador-at-Large Stephen Sestanovich, Special Advisor to the Secretary of States for the New Independent States, “Chechen rebels are receiving help from radical groups in other countries, including Usama Bin Laden’s network and others who have attacked or threatened Americans and American interests.” See his “The Conflict in Chechnya and its Implications for U.S. Relations with Russia,” testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, November 4, 1999, p. 2.

Syria and hope to develop even further relations with other American enemies in the Middle East such as Iraq. For them, therefore, a Russian realignment in the Middle East means fewer hard cash contracts. These military enterprises enjoy strong support within the Duma.

Fourth, the Communist Part of the Russian Federation and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia have spoken openly against Russia's new foreign policy orientation, arguing that Putin's new strategy represents a sell out of Russian national security interests. Fortunately, these two groups matter less than ever before. Yet, their public statements are shared by many more privately.

Fifth, even the pro-Western liberals are divided. Publicly, the Union of Right Forces and its chairman, Boris Nemtsov, has endorsed Putin's strategic Western turn. Nemtsov and his associates believe that Putin has decided, at least temporarily, to ally with the liberals and move away from his old KGB allies. They see this moment as a real opportunity for breakthrough for their causes. Grigory Yavlinsky and his Yabloko party also have praised the president's foreign policy moves. At the same time, and less publicly, voices within both of these organizations, as well as human rights activists, worry that Putin will use the camouflage of the war against terrorism to roll back democratic practices within Russia even further.

Sixth, and finally, Russian society is divided. While the majority in polls has expressed solidarity with the American cause, this same society is divided about the wisdom of engaging in another war with Afghanistan.

Putin domestic support for his new foreign policy orientation is weak. To be sure, Putin has much more support within society and much more stable state than do other leaders of new coalition partners such as Pakistan, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia. How stable and lasting this support will be, however, is not clear. If, for instance, Russia begins to experience economic difficulties in part due to the war against terrorism (oil prices have already fallen dramatically), quiet criticism of Putin's policy may become more public. And then what? Past experience would suggest that Putin would pull away from his forward leaning policy, unless he can show tangible gains from the new orientation.

Recommendations for New U.S. Policy Initiatives towards Russia

Putin has not put forth a wish list of deliverables that Russia wants in return for its cooperation in the war against terrorism. This is not Putin's style of diplomacy. At the same time, if Russia does not realize some benefits from new pro-American orientation, backlash will occur. Some Russian analysts already are drawing parallels between Putin's current foreign policy reorientation and that undertaken by Gorbachev at the end of the 1980s. For many in Russia's foreign policy and security establishment, the Gorbachev analogy connotes a negative experience that must not be repeated.

Obviously, the Bush administration is focused primarily on immediate military objectives in Afghanistan and homeland defense. Yet, Bush and his administration as well as congressional leaders must take advantage of this window of opportunity in Russian-American relations to truly end the Cold War. American foreign policy leaders

in both the executive and legislative branches must establish a realistic sequence of milestones that, if met, could finally integrate Russia fully and permanently into the Western community of democratic states and market economies. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Declare that the United States No Longer Recognizes Russia as the Successor State to the Soviet Union. The Russian state has decided to accept many international obligations once assigned to the USSR. If Russian government leaders willingly accepted these responsibilities, be they treaty obligations or Soviet debts, then they must be held accountable for their decisions. However, the United States and the U.S. Congress in particular is not commensurately obligated to keep in place legislation written specifically to punish or influence the Soviet communist regime. Congress should establish a special working group to review all laws written during the Cold War designed (quite rightly) to punish the USSR. Restrictions on high technology exports and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the 1974 Trade Act are two examples of effective tools from the Cold War era that need review today.
2. Push for Russian membership into the WTO. President Putin has stated his desire to see Russia join the WTO. By pressing forward with a new bilateral trading agreement with Russia, the United States should become the leading advocate for Russian accession. Because Russian domestic manufacturers are still weak and disorganized, it will be easier for Russia to join the WTO today than it will be when these domestic interest groups become more consolidated.
3. Establish a More Formal Alliance Relationship between NATO and Russia. Putin has hinted several times that he would like to see Russia become a NATO member. These statements are both encouraging and dangerous. It is encouraging that the Russian president is not continuing the ineffective anti-NATO rhetorical assault pursued by many Russian foreign policy leaders throughout the 1990s. At the same time, Putin's statements also could be fueling unrealistic expectations within Russia. In particular, Putin has stated that Russia could join NATO **if** NATO becomes a political organization. But NATO will never (or should never) become a purely political organization. It is a military alliance. Like all other Western international institutions, Russia can join only if it accepts the rules of membership and does not try to change the rules of membership as a precondition for joining. Russian membership into NATO is a worthy, but distant goal. (I like the year 2017 – 100 years after the Bolshevik revolution – as a target date.) To occur, however, Russia and NATO must establish interim arrangements that prove the benefits of cooperation to both sides. The Permanent Joint Council (PJC) is already in place, but underutilized. Russia in particular must take advantage of this institution. In addition to a more effective PJC, a next step might be a more formal treaty relationship between Russia and NATO. Before joining the NATO alliance, Russia might become formally allied with NATO.
4. End the Boycott of Russian arms purchases by NATO members. The announcement of a new policy allowing NATO allies to buy Russian arms would not led to massive

new contracts for the Russian arms makers. Symbolically, however, such a policy change would undermine the claim of the Russian military industrial complex that NATO expansion is principally an export promotion policy for Western arms makers.

5. Push for a Closer Relationship between the European Union and Russia. In many respects, it will be easier for Russia to join NATO than the European Union. In Russia, however, even the most astute foreign policy observers do not understand the difficulties of Russian membership into the EU. They must be educated. However, the EU also must be pushed to establish more creative ways for engaging countries on its periphery. At the EU expands, it eventually will operate on a tiered system, with the core interacting a different level of intensity and degree of integration than some new members. Trading regimes similar to NAFTA may be a way to offer greater integration of Russia into European trade and investment markets without undertaking the steps necessary for full membership.
6. Sign a New Agreement with Russia to Replace the ABM Treaty. Before September 11th, the Bush administration was in a hurry to abrogate the ABM Treaty. Ideological principles, not American strategic needs, pushed the pace. After September 11th, the Bush administration has realized the value of allies and treaties. They should apply these lessons to our relationship with Russia. The ABM Treaty is a relic of the Cold War. It must be changed or replaced. The first step in undermining the basis for this treaty will be drastic reductions in American and Russian nuclear arsenals (also a lingering legacy of the Cold War.) If the American nuclear arsenal of strategic weapons fell below 2,000, then the Russians would be more assured that American plans to build missile defenses were intended to deter or protect the U.S. from rogue states and were not designed as a weapon against Russia. If Russia becomes a more cooperative partner and a successful joiner of Western institutions, then American leaders could even begin to build joint missile defense systems with Russia. The first step towards such cooperation could begin now by jointly modernizing and sharing information from our respective early warning systems. Ideally, Bush and Putin would initial a new framework for strategic stability that would spell out shared principles about the proper balance between offensive and defense weapons. An important component of such a document must be comprehensive verification measures. Until Russia has fully integrated into the West, the motto must always remain Ronald Reagan's famous quip, 'trust but verify.' It is silly to continue to think of Russia as a strategic competitor. It is imprudent and misleading to pretend that Russia is an ally with whom treaties are no longer necessary. After all, even with its closest partners in Europe, the United States still maintains a credible commitment of mutual defense through a treaty – the North Atlantic *Treaty* Organization. Putin will allow the Bush administration to pursue any missile defense system, just as long as it is codified in some kind of binding agreement.
7. Buy Russian Weapons to Send to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance already relies on Russian weapons. We should resupply them by purchasing Russian weapons for them. The symbolism of an American (or Italian)

purchase of Russian weapons also would be significant. This practice is not new. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan the Carter and Reagan administrations purchased weapons from communist Czechoslovakia to send to the anti-Soviet forces fighting in Afghanistan.

8. Speak Clearly about Chechnya. The Bush administration was right to call upon the Chechen leadership to sever its ties with international terrorist organizations. At the same time the Bush administration must emphasize that not all Chechens – not even all Chechen fighters – are terrorists. The Bush administration also should actively encourage negotiations between Chechen leaders and the Russian government. Moderate Chechen leaders and the Russian government actually have a mutual enemy in the extremists who have been attracted to fight in the Chechen war. The negative lessons of Russia's war against terrorism almost must be realized. Fighting a just cause by unjust means has produced disastrous results for Russian national security.
9. Cooperate to Fight Terrorism in Georgia in the wake of September 11th, Russian military commanders in the Caucasus may wrongly believe that they now have a green light to pursue terrorists within Georgian territory. Such an intervention would have disastrous consequences for Georgia and U.S.-Russia relations. As an act of preventive defense, the United States must become more engaged in helping the Georgian government to secure its borders. Working on opposite sides of the Georgian border, American and Russian military officials might even cooperate to secure the area. Above all else, the United States cannot allow Russia to 'fight terrorism' unilaterally within Georgian territory.
10. Increase Support for Russian Democratization. Russia will only be a full-fledged ally of the United States if Russia becomes a full-fledged democracy. On the economic front, Putin has demonstrated his strong desire to make Russia a liberal market economy. The structural reforms drafted by his government and passed by the parliament this past spring were truly radical. On the political side, however, Putin has shown little proclivity for deepening democracy. On the contrary, Putin and his government have weakened Russia's already fragile democratic institutions. The best way to support further democratization within Russia is to increase direct assistance to Russian democrats. If many other items on my list require executive initiative, this policy change does not. Congress should pass the legislation introduced by Tom Lantos this summer, which would provide for increased funds for Russian democracy.

Conclusion

In our fight against terrorism, many of our new coalition partners will be temporary allies. However, our newly developing relationship with Russia has the potential to blossom into something deeper and more lasting. The key condition for such a positive outcome is the deepening of Russian democratization. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States had to forge alliances with dictatorships and

democracies Even Stalin's USSR was an American ally for a time. Over time, however, the democracies on the list proved to be the more effective and reliable allies. Not infrequently, ostensible gains in the short term from partnerships with anti-democratic regimes and movements – such as the Shah in Iran, the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia, the mujaheddin in Afghanistan, and the apartheid regime in South Africa -- were more than offset by setbacks to American security and embarrassments to American ideals in the long term. Today, it not simply coincidence that no democracy in the world is an enemy of the United States, while every sworn enemy of the United States is a dictatorship. Russia has the chance to join the list of our permanent friends, but only if we take seriously Russian integration into our Western institutions and Russia's takes seriously democratization. The potential for breakthrough – for a fundamentally new and improved relationship between Russia and the West – has never been greater. If we fail this time around, however, the next window of opportunity might not open for decades to come.