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## Competition over Eurasia: Are the U.S. and Russia on a Collision Course?

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Russia and the United States continue to bicker over the post-Soviet space. They often remind one of an old married couple who forever exchange accusations but never reach a common ground. Do they need counseling? Are they moving towards divorce? The potential for Russia and the U.S. to pursue a parallel foreign policy in the region—one based on interests, not emotions—is greater than many think. This, however, is often difficult to achieve.

Today, the Bush Administration's national security priorities include Iraq, nonproliferation, the war on terrorism, Iran, China, energy, and democratization. With the exception of Iraq, all of these Administration priorities require good relations with Russia. Therefore, ties with Moscow should be high on the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

U.S. support for small countries or for the "multi-color" revolutions on the Russian periphery may be important, but it should not dictate U.S. grand strategy, which is defined by national interests. The U.S. went out of its way to support Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in their pushes for democratic change. At the end of the day, however, we cannot support our friends by derailing our relations with Moscow. Nor should we shy away from the important task of promoting democracy worldwide.

### **Moscow's View**

Russia's misperceptions regarding her own neighbors, as well as her misreading of many U.S. goals in the region, have made pursuing U.S. policy in Eurasia par-

### **Talking Points**

- Democracy can be extremely beneficial for the newly independent states with no tradition of statehood. It can be a source of legitimate governance and provide stability after mismanagement and corruption undermine people's faith in the government. Russia itself could benefit from appreciating and implementing democratic values and processes more than it currently does.
- The countries of the post-Soviet space are real countries with their own interests, and this is what some in Moscow prefer to ignore. These countries will find their diplomatic voice between Moscow, Washington, Beijing, and Brussels.
- Russia and the U.S. can benefit if they work together to address their national interests, which are less mutually exclusive than many currently think. We will benefit if we try to work together for a prosperous and democratic Eurasia.

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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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ticularly difficult. For centuries, Russians viewed Ukrainians as “little brothers,” heaping scorn on their attempts to pursue independence or even to develop a language and culture of their own. The Russian elite fail to recognize Ukraine’s distinct culture or the separate interests of its ruling class.

There is a deep conviction in Moscow that everyone in the neighborhood will be happy under more, not less, Russian influence. Moscow believes that the countries and peoples that it dominated for centuries are ungrateful to Russia for carrying out its *mission civilisatrice* and for its historic achievements—such as the defense of the Georgians from the Turks in the 18th century and the protection of Ukrainians from the Poles in the 17th—which are no longer perceived as vital or important.

Today, real concerns, such as Moscow’s support for separatism in Trans-Dniester, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Karabakh and business priorities such as energy transit, oil, gas and electricity supply, and migration, dictate attitudes in the “near abroad” towards Russia much more than historic memories do.

Americans often feel the Russian elites and policymakers believe that the U.S. has no business in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). U.S. political agendas, such as the promotion of democracy and the establishment of military bases to pursue the war on terrorism, are easily dismissed. Moscow indicated its deep apprehension about a vital energy artery when it opposed the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline from the Caspian, which after 10 years in the making will finally open for commercial operations this fall.

### Washington’s View

The Cold War left its scars in Washington. Some in the U.S. still view Russia as an inherently evil imperial power, despite repeated statements by its leaders that Russia is not interested in re-creation of the Soviet Union and does not have the power, finances, or *raison d’etat* to pursue it. In some quarters, there are still voices which say, “We love Russia so much, we want several of them,” dreaming of a Russian dissolution along regional lines: the North Caucasus, Far East, or Siberia and Iran.

These people do not recognize the danger that chaos in nuclear-armed Russia could pose for the area from the Baltic to the Pacific, from the Arctic to the Black Sea, and to the rest of the world. If Russia collapses, China and the Islamist circles which are fanning the flames of separatism in the North Caucasus will win. Nuclear weapons may fall into the hands of rogues. Extremists and criminal elements, already at large in the North Caucasus, would have a field day. This is not at all in America’s interests.

While it is not the policy of the Bush Administration to pursue Russia’s breakup, some in Moscow confuse the academic writings of former government officials with actual strategic goals. This is simply wrong. Russia, in turn, does not help by pursuing heavy-handed policies in Chechnya and elsewhere in the region—policies which alienate local populations and swell the ranks of the opposition. Tensions in the region also stem from regimes and leaders who have overstayed their welcome.

It is time to discuss and understand better what the two countries mean by “stability” and “democracy.”

### Challenges to Democratization

Washington is right to support democratic forces around the world, including in the former Soviet Union. Those Russian “experts” who describe the orange and other revolutions as purely artifacts “made in the U.S.A.” are wrong. They do not recognize the depth of frustration with Eduard Shevardnadze’s final years of malaise or Leonid Kuchma’s pervasive corruption.

There are also those in Moscow’s “political technology” circles—paid consultants who read too much Machiavelli—who cynically deny people the right to express their opinion as to how they are governed. They state publicly that people vote for those who pay better. If that’s the case, the outcome in Ukraine would have been different. They are reminiscent of Stalin, who cynically observed that it does not matter how people vote; it only matters who counts the votes.

These are the “experts” who advocate using “all means possible”—meaning brutal force—for

regimes to cling to power. We have seen the high price people have paid in places like Andijan when rulers follow this advice. We know how dictators abuse their office to enrich themselves and their families. If people perceive Russia as supportive of dictators, its popularity will plummet in Minsk, Tashkent, or Ashghabad.

This is not in Russia's interest, any more than it is in America's interest to support regime change for the sake of regime change or to abuse democratic processes to put into power those who spew pro-American or anti-Russian slogans. The U.S. should not support every firebrand who spouts anti-Russian rhetoric. Radical nationalist forces, which supported the Nazis in World War II, such as the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and Ukrainian Insurgent Army, known as OUN and UPA, are still active in Ukrainian politics. Shamil Basaev, the terrorist Chechen Islamist, and the radical Islamist Hizb-ut-Tahrir party produce plenty of anti-Russian rhetoric, but this does not mean that they are friends of the U.S.

Nor should the U.S. support self-serving carpet-baggers. It does America no good to support leaders who, once they obtain power, proceed to plunder the meager resources of their countries or argue endlessly about re-nationalization and re-privatization (meaning, who is going to get how big a cut of the pie). Such petty bickering betrays the trust that their people have placed in them.

There are also those in the U.S. whose organizational budgets and press coverage depend on supporting revolutions of different colors. They disregard that the policy outcomes of the revolutions they support may be negative for the country involved and not in line with U.S. interests. For example, radical Islamist forces coming to power through the ballot box will not contribute to U.S. security any more than did the "democratically" elected Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler.

Some in Washington close their eyes to the deficits in democracy and transparency plaguing the multi-color revolutions in the post-Soviet space. However, recent events, such as the firing of the Yushchenko team in Ukraine, make it impossible to ignore the post-revolutionary flaws.

Nor does it make any sense for Moscow to blindly support "pro-Russian" regimes that are steeped in corruption and reign through oppression. Sooner or later, the abuses of dictators such as Turkmenbashi of Turkmenistan or Lukashenko of Belarus are quite likely to result in regime change. All the Russians will have done by uncritically sticking with them to the bitter end is to assure that whatever regimes follow will be, unsurprisingly, anti-Russian.

Democracy can be extremely beneficial for the newly independent states with no tradition of statehood. It can be a source of legitimate governance and provide stability after mismanagement and corruption undermine people's faith in the government. One can argue that we are witnessing this in the Baltic States. Russia itself could benefit from appreciating and implementing democratic values and processes more than it currently does.

The countries of the post-Soviet space, however, are real countries with their own interests, and this is what some in Moscow prefer to ignore. These countries will find their diplomatic voice between Moscow, Washington, Beijing, and Brussels.

## Russian Goals

Russia claims it wants stability in the post-Soviet space. President Vladimir Putin and senior Russian officials have said that they do not mind change but want it to come without violations of the law and constitutions. However, Moscow applies this paradigm to those regimes that make it uncomfortable, such as Ukraine, but not to those authoritarian states which violate their own laws and jail or kill their own citizens, such as Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Russia should work with the United States and the European Union to promote, not hinder, democracy in the CIS.

Russian military goals in the countries of the Common Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the military bloc of the CIS, are clear: joint control of borders and air space; joint rapid reaction task forces to combat terrorism; Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Armenia; and no foreign bases.

Russia provides support to separatist forces and statelets, such as Trans-Dniester, Abkhazia, North

Ossetia, and Karabakh. The aim of this support stems from Moscow's long-standing desire to weaken post-Soviet states, such as Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. However, separatism may be a double-edged sword. Russia would view with extreme prejudice outside attempts to militarily strengthen Chechen, other North Caucasus, Tatar, Fenno-Ugric, or Yakut nationalists who live in the Russian territory. Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

Russia views itself correctly as the economic engine of the CIS. It is pushing for higher prices for its energy, which it supplies, often at a discount, to its neighbors. It also lobbies for the Common Economic Space (CES), a free trade zone and a common market for Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. However, Moscow is not convinced that free movement of labor in the CES is desirable, and a common currency of Russian design is not likely to be introduced any time soon. Membership in the CES may also prevent these states from joining the World Trade Organization.

### The Chinese Elephant in the Room

Russia seems to be oblivious to the growing power of China. Beijing has launched—and Russia has accepted—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which sets a precedent, committing China to fight “separatism, extremism and terrorism” in countries of the post-Soviet space.

China views Central Asia as its “near abroad,” a strategic rear. As its economic muscle grows, so will its geopolitical appetites. Chinese troops will take part in maneuvers in Central Asia and will be part of the SCO rapid reaction force deployed in Central Asia, acquiring local knowledge and building relations with indigenous military forces and political elites.

China is the largest consumer of Russian military hardware and technology and is likely to surpass Russia technologically in the next couple of decades. But the giant shadow being cast by Beijing goes far beyond the purely military and security realms. It directly affects economics and business as well.

As the recent \$4.18 billion acquisition of Petrokazakhstan oil company by China National

Petroleum Company demonstrates, Russian energy interests may be adversely affected by China's quest for oil and gas. China also provided a \$6 billion loan to Rosneft to purchase Yuganskneftegaz, an oil asset with a capacity of 1 million barrels a day, and succeeded in derailing Japanese plans to build an oil pipeline to Nakhodka. Instead, Yuganskneftegaz is likely to get Moscow's permission to build the pipeline to the Chinese city of Daikin, in northeastern China.

China has indicated its willingness to invest billions of dollars in Russia and Central Asia, including in strategic areas such as the Far East, Siberia, and even along the Moscow–St. Petersburg highway. However, resource-poor and population-rich China may only be a threat in the long term. In the meantime, Russia's security and territorial integrity is under attack not from the United States, but by radical Islamist and nationalist elements in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. In fact, the U.S. can and should help Russia to fight radical Islam in that area.

### Finding Common Ground

As the earlier discussion of U.S. foreign policy indicates, many of America's goals are dependent on cooperation with Russia. These include Iran, the global war on terrorism, nonproliferation, energy, and the rise of China (not necessarily in that order). Specifically, Russia and the U.S. have to agree on a joint threat assessment. They need to realize that they are facing common threats from common sources, such as radical Islamist militants, before they can develop and implement joint policies in these areas.

**Joining Forces in the War on Terrorism.** While the subject of this lecture is the U.S. and Russia in the former Soviet sphere, one cannot ignore the largest “hot” conflict in that region, which is Chechnya and, increasingly, the North Caucasus where Russia's grip is becoming more tenuous. Here, Wahhabi/Salafi madrassahs and Islamic “communities” (*jama'ats*), which do not recognize secular jurisdiction, are growing by leaps and bounds. Funding and ideological preparation of imams, propagandists, and military leaders comes from the same sources as those of al-Qaeda and other radical organizations in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere.



With Wahhabi/Salafi influence growing in Uzbekistan and inside Russia itself, in the Northern Caucasus as well as in places like Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Azerbaijan, and even predominantly Shiite areas, the whole southern “soft underbelly” of Russia can be destabilized. Russian leaders need to recognize this. U.S. policymakers should realize that if vast lands between China and the Black Sea destabilize or fall into the hands of extremists, this will threaten U.S. security interests. Energy supply from the Caspian basin will be in danger, and terrorist access to weapons of mass destruction technology will expand.

U.S.–Russian cooperation in stemming the flow of finances, arms, preachers, and trainers is necessary. The joint U.S.–Russian Kislyak–Burns Committee on Anti-Terrorism, named after the two deputy foreign ministers who chair it, needs to expand its operations and focus on specific projects with participation of border police, banking regulators, customs officials, and security services on both sides.

**Developing Energy Resources.** While meeting with Western policy experts on September 5, President Vladimir Putin talked about building a pipeline from Siberia to “the North” to supply U.S. markets with Russian oil. However, Mr. Putin did not specify at which port in the Arctic Ocean the pipeline would terminate.

Ports suggested by the Russian oil pipeline monopoly Transneft freeze five to six months a year, but there exists an Arctic port which stays ice-free year-round and is yearning for more cargo, including oil and gas. This is Murmansk with its huge, deep natural fjord and a large population that would welcome employment. In the meeting with President Bush on September 16 and at the 2006 G-8 Energy Security meeting in Russia, the U.S. and Russia need to agree that the pipeline will be built to Murmansk.

Moreover, President Putin did not mention which companies will develop the fields and which will comprise the consortium that will build the pipeline. Negotiating that agreement should take priority on the highest level. As the demand for hydrocarbons is high and so are prices, decisions need to be made

within three to six months to ensure that deals are signed and development started.

In September, the Russian state-owned gas monopoly Gazprom shipped a tanker with liquid natural gas (LNG) to the U.S. For now, it was a trial shipment and a swap in which Russian gas was substituted by gas from a third country, but next year, Gazprom is planning to send to the U.S. five ships of LNG. Russia is inviting U.S. companies to participate in developing the giant offshore natural gas field called Shtokman. Decisions on participation also need to be made fast, as the U.S. natural gas market is experiencing shortages of supply and prices are likely to rise.

As the U.S. is expecting to boost the global oil supply through the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) Main Export Pipeline, Kazakhstani supplies to that route will be increasingly important. The U.S. can invite Russian companies to join in building a trans-Caspian pipeline to connect the giant Kazakhstani fields of Tengiz, Karachganak, and Kashagan to the BTC. A Russian stake in this project is likely to dampen Moscow’s opposition.

**Balancing the China Card.** Some in Russia believe that Moscow can play the China card against Washington, just as President Richard Nixon and Dr. Henry Kissinger played the China card against the USSR over 30 years ago. However, a *carte blanche* for Beijing may quickly limit Russia’s freedom of maneuver in the Far East, Siberia, and Central Asia. Russia’s relations with Japan are already deteriorating because of the Sino–Russian rapprochement.

Russia can put itself in an advantageous position by signaling to Beijing that it has better options than becoming China’s raw materials appendage. Seen in this light, Russia should not fear the U.S. presence in Eurasia, as a new balance-of-power game is being played there. Russia should drop its objections to U.S. military bases, such as Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan, which may be evacuated in the near future, and should work closely with the U.S. and NATO to develop a new geopolitical geometry for the 21st century.

Inviting the U.S. and possibly India and Japan to expand their investments in the Far East and Sibe-

ria; joining U.S., European, Japanese, and Indian firms in large-scale investments in Central Asia—all this would enhance Russia's freedom of maneuver vis-à-vis China. Finally, inviting the U.S. to participate as an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization would help to keep this organization from becoming hostile to the U.S. and driving up tensions across the region.

### Conclusion

Russia and the U.S. can benefit if they work together to address their national interests, which are less mutually exclusive than many currently think. We will benefit if we try to work together for a prosperous and democratic Eurasia, with Russia occupying a place of honor. However, the question is: Do we play a zero-sum game, a win-lose game, or a win-win game? Russia is playing a win-lose game against the U.S. but may think it is playing a win-win game with China. But are there even hieroglyphics for “win-win” in Chinese geopolitics?

In the future, does Russia want to be a member of the community of democracies or a junior partner in a coalition led by China? Talking about Eurasia, one quickly touches the third rail of the debate between Westernizers and Eurasianists, which has

been going on for a century and a half. Do the Russian elites, who are culturally European, want to be politically European as well? The majority of them did a hundred years ago, as well as in the early 1990s. Does Russia want to be politically like Uzbekistan or Pakistan? Or like the U.S. and Canada? Or maybe like Korea, Taiwan, and India? After all, democracy ceased to be a Western invention a long time ago.

When the chips are down, Russia may also reassess its rapprochement with China and the cold shoulder it is increasingly providing to Washington. France and Germany are improving relations with the U.S. Shouldn't Russia? It is not too late yet, but the sand in the geopolitical hourglass may be running out.

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