Russia in the Twenty-first Century

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Abstract

Russia's position in the world is determined by her relations with the US, with both the Democrats and the Communists expecting some form of parity. But the US has not defeated Russia in the Cold War to concede parity. The US unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty in 2001; the START negotiations have lost meaning; NATO has been steadily expanded over Russian objections; and Russia has accepted US bases in Central Asia. Russia can seek solace in the NMD not yet being technologically convincing, in NATO being too flabby for action and Russia herself being a part of NATO, in the terrorist threat of the Taliban being eliminated, and in the absence of direct confrontation with the US. Therefore Russia has turned her attention to conventional capability to beat off threats like the Chechen insurgency and to reforming the army. Russia's dealing with Libya, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea have more to do with commercial calculations than challenges to the US. Her special relationships with China and India, the ones that are genuinely independent of US, are likewise driven by the commercial issue of large scale arms sales rather than strategic considerations, although the latter are always kept in view in case they have to be activated.

I

The logic of the defeat in the Cold War in 1985-91 inexorably works its way as Russian policy choices are governed by analogy with great power defeats in history. The first of the alternatives was to accept the defeat and attempt a recovery and reassertion, as did Prussia after 1806, Russia after 1856 and 1918, and Germany after 1919. The other was to accept defeat and collaborate with the victors in a new power bloc, as did Britain after the American War of Independence, France after 1815, Germany and Japan after 1945, and even Britain and France after 1945 since their victory led to irreversible decline and to their status as auxiliaries of the USA in the manner of Germany and Japan.

Russian politics was polarized around these alternatives, as if other options were not available or possible. Broadly speaking, the Communists chose the first one of recovery and reassertion, and the Democrats the second one of recovery and collaboration, with the premise of recovery to European levels of development being held in common. The Democrats could and did present their positions as a victory, not over the USA or the West, but over a Communism that was polemically portrayed as Stalinist, totalitarian, and stagnant. The Communists could project no victory of any kind, not even over their own inadequacies. The Democrats expected and promised that their great triumph would result in Western bounty in the quantity and quality that resuscitated Germany and Japan after 1945 and ensured their stability, prosperity, and security over the

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next half century. To make it more feasible, Russia would shed the dross of the less developed and "Asiatic" regions of the Soviet Union, that is especially Central Asia and Transcaucasia. The dissolution of what began to be called the Soviet Empire and the subordination to the USA was premised on a logic that seemed flawless by historical analogy.

It was the culmination of the struggle for the mastery of the world that was conducted from the end of the nineteenth century by the six great or imperialist powers, the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Russia, and Japan. There were too many competitors for a globalized world; World War I did not solve the problem, which was then carried over to World War II under different ideological banners; and the partial solution emerged with four of the rivals knocked out of the contest, leaving behind just the USA and the USSR in the lists. Nuclear power made a hot war between them impossible; accordingly the great joust continued as a Cold War between the principals and proxy hot wars by clients until the bitter end in 1991 leaving a clear winner.

During the Cold War however, the two super powers enjoyed something akin to a condominium of the world. The silver lining in Democratic defeatism was the hope, advertised as an expectation, that the history, size, resources, and capacity of Russia would ensure that she become more a partner to the USA after the fashion of the Cold War condominium than prosperous vassals like the Europeans or a regional power like China. The Democrats thus offered more than the Communists could: European prosperity over Soviet social security, capitalist dynamism in lieu of socialist stagnation, access to the world instead of parochial isolation, and possibly even the condominium of the world through peaceful collaboration instead of debilitating arms races and confrontation. They were making an offer that few could refuse!

Not only does history not repeat itself, whether as tragedy or farce, but in this case the analogy was inadequate and self-serving to both the contestants. Both have ignored what is perhaps the decisive aspect of the recovery of Europe and Japan after World War II. They were reconstructed, not as an end in itself, but as Cold War strategy against the single antagonist in the Soviet Union and Communism. After the Cold War, there is no such single focus, and there would be no compulsion to reconstruct Russia beyond ensuring stability for nuclear security, containing terrorism, policing the neighbourhood (Transcaucasia and Central Asia), peacekeeping, combating organized crime, and insulating the prosperous world from lean and hungry immigrants. The US victory at the end of the twentieth century is unique in history. It has never before happened that a single power has been left with no possible competitor anywhere on the planet. It would defeat the purpose of such a victory to reconstruct the defeated party as a potential challenger once again. Collaboration would be meaningful only in conditions of effective subordination, as in the case of Europe to USA, or limitation, as with India and China. Russian recovery in the absence of a further overarching contest presages both insubordination and super power capacity. The USA could not possibly endorse a Russian recovery and reconstruction in strategic terms.

Both Democrats and Communists have further ignored two other likely possibilities. The first was another famous historical route, that of extinction, as happened with the Ottoman and Hapsburg Empires, reduced to the nation states of Turkey and Austria respectively, and recommended by diehard cold warriors like Zbigniew Brzezinski who want to see Russia contract to European Russia. The further relevance of the analogy is that their decline lasted a century and a

half until their final extinction in the aftermath of World War I. Naturally enough, none in Russia could contemplate such a future. The second is the most realistic possibility of all, that Russia shall dwindle into a regional power in the league of China and India without recovery to European levels or partnership with the USA. This is the legacy that Gorbachev and Yeltsin have left to Putin.

II

Russia's global position and much of her domestic evolution is now governed by the relation with the US and the multilateral institutions and alliance systems dominated by the US. After the defeat and dissolution of the Soviet Union, the persecution and attenuation of the Communist Party, and the further dismantling of Soviet state and economic structures through "regionalization" and privatization respectively, the next major US priority has been achieved. Russia in effect lost strategic parity when the US withdrew on 13 December 2001 from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972. The militarization of space has begun in right earnest; and capacity in nuclear and air power, or in missile systems based on land, in the sea, or in the air, are no ultimate protection from missiles based in space. Russia was not afforded even the fig leaf of a joint revision of the ABM Treaty, and it was made clear to both the Russian public and the wider world that fundamental strategic questions would be decided unilaterally by the US. The Russian response has been resigned and sober. Russia has consoled herself with the observation that the US National Missile Defence system is still being tested and Russia is still in fact secure.

In such circumstances, arms reduction talks and agreements have diminished in significance. START 1, was signed in 1991, entered into force in 1994, and is the only one of the strategic arms reduction treaties that have been carried out fully, with both sides reducing accountable offensive arms levels to 6000 warheads each. START 2, signed in 1993, fixed an upper limit of 3000-3500 deployed warheads; but it never came into force. START 3 discussions were begun in 1999 but were superceded by the Moscow Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reduction on 24 May 2002. This set the limits at 1700-2200 strategic nuclear warheads by 2012; but Putin had already offered the low figure of 1500 in November 2000 itself, and such low figures may be inferred from Russian budgets. Nuclear deterrence is changing in meaning; and "unacceptable damage" now seems to be possible whether the levels are 1500, 3500, or 6000. It suggests that the USA and Russia are no longer targets to each other; it also implies, but not yet stated as such, that when NMD shall take effect, if it does eventually, such deterrence would be of little meaning and would be relegated to low priority.

As Russia submits to US strategic priorities, she has abandoned any attempt at positioning herself militarily in space, is gradually reducing the scope of her space research and exploration programme, and commits herself to progressive strategic arms reductions. Her main security concern is no longer the US; and even if it were, she is confident for the present that she has the capacity to inflict "unacceptable damage." Her security problems arise more from the conventional sources of secession, terrorism, proliferation, and organized crime. Her military and armament requirements in these fields are of a kind for which Soviet structures have not prepared her, and the Chechen "ulcer" exposes all of them with the density of a black hole.

Putin therefore has been nudging his military establishment by gradual degrees to accept this dramatic shift of focus. In 2000, the issue of strategic versus conventional forces was thrashed out between Sergeyev, the defence minister, and Anatoly Kvashnin, the chief of general staff, and Putin tipped the balance in favour of conventional forces leading to the eventual replacement of Sergeyev by Sergei Ivanov. That argument remains valid to this day, that precious resources were being squandered on accumulating ICBMs, SS-27s, and SS-25s which were never to be used, while items urgently needed for the uninterrupted haemorrhage in Chechnya, be they attack helicopters, fixed wing aircraft for fog, body armour, or steel helmets, or more advanced assets, like smart weapons, could not be acquired even when produced by the Russian defence industry. The Chechen insurgency mingling with waves of terrorism and organized crime has reinforced these arguments many times over. While the choice in favour of conventional military development is gaining ground, superior Russian skills in various advanced but underused technologies are available on the world market, whether for India, China, or even Iran and the USA. These may lead to acrimonious disputes and hard bargains with the US, but they should not be mistaken for strategic challenges: they are maximally commercial ventures, political postures, bargaining positions, and individual or institutional entrepreneurship which is called corruption in certain circles.

But the transition to contract or volunteer forces from conscript forces is tortuous and bitterly contested. In the event of an emergency, a new system of reserves and mobilization would have to be available; and it would have to integrate training with civilian higher educational institutions. Subsistence salaries of 1000 roubles a month would have to rise manifold to attract youth of appropriate quality. Boris Nemtsov, the leader of the Union of Right Wing Forces, has suggested something in the region of 7000 roubles a month. In addition, infrastructure and provision for families would need to be provided for, with schools, crèches, jobs for wives and much else. The costs are prohibitive, and conscription is easier despite its obvious drawbacks. But the endemic crisis and ineffectiveness of the army imposes hard decisions, and Putin decided in November 2001 that the conversion must be undertaken. It began with the Pskov Airborne Division in September 2002; and in July 2003, a timetable was set, by which at least half of the army would be on contract by 2007 and military service would be reduced from two years to one year. There has been strong resistance from the military establishment, but Putin has overridden them.

The problem with re-orientation to conventional forces does not end there. So far conventional military preparedness has been premised on a NATO attack, or an invasion which was to be countered by overwhelming force on land, sea, and air, and, in the event of failure, by nuclear attack. The military reiterated its meaning by staging the grandiose West ’99 Belarus-Russia exercise to hold off NATO at all three levels of ground, sea, and air, apparently in response to the Kosovo war of 1999. It did so yet again from 20 January 2004, when all conventional forces and strategic forces including cruise missiles were thrown into the colossal “Operation Shield” exercise apparently to test responses to the American National Missile Defence system. Critics have suggested that these are perhaps sops to the military and more of an exercise to attract votes as Putin heads for election in March 2004. These may also be technically necessary since Russian ICBMs are up to 30 years old and have to be periodically test fired to check for efficiency. The testing thus takes the form of an exercise. It suits everybody.

The conscript army of more than a million, their training and doctrine were all however based on assumptions which the majority of the military establishment continue to affirm as valid, but which critics, including Putin, dismiss as obsolete. Insurgency, terror, and crime cannot be deterred or defeated by nuclear power or vast conventional forces. They need rapid action professional volunteer units with sophisticated training, not masses of ill-trained conscripts and millions of reserves; they require a different range of specialized military hardware like reconnaissance-attack systems, military transport and multi-purpose combat planes, and high-precision weaponry; and the rigid distinction between armed forces for external defence and internal security must fade.

The argument on the conversion to a contract army contains important strategic choices over and above the obvious financial ones. If neither the existence nor the territory of Russia is any longer threatened, and she must prepare more for insurgency, terror, and crime, she would be slipping into the position of the Europeans in relation to America. As Condoleezza Rice put it in 2000 during the presidential election campaign, America would fight the wars, and the Europeans would follow up with the peacekeeping. The military would become yet another Soviet relic, which in effect it has already become.

The dilemma for Russian strategic planners is painful. What if American military might were to be turned on Russia in the manner it has been on Yugoslavia in 1995 and 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 1990 and 2003, and may well be on Iran; and how could Russia respond to a threat from China? The answer of the Democrats within Russia, and generally of various western centres of power is that these dangers have dissipated with the Cold War, that integration with the West forecloses such possibilities, and that in the last resort, at least against China, the nuclear option remains. The Military Doctrine and the National Security Concept were both revised in 2000 to reaffirm the nuclear option, the first when the conventional threat was too great, and the second when other means to hold off aggression were inadequate. The process of arriving at choices is tortuous and marked by bitter dispute, but its direction seems to be steadily heading away from Soviet levels of independence to European forms of dependence and integration.

III

The Russian response to NATO expansion fits into this pattern of protest and eventual quiet submission. This has occurred so far in three phases. Russia signed the NATO Partnership for Peace Initiative in June 1994 and participated in the Implementation Force and its successor, the Stabilization Force (SFOR), in Bosnia in 1995. May 1997 saw the NATO-Russia Founding Act leading to higher levels of co-operation and a Russian voice in NATO councils. Yeltsin presented this to the Russian public as the elimination of the NATO threat since Russia must be involved in any decision; but NATO and American officials never failed to repeat the brutal clarification of Madeleine Albright, the Secretary of State, that this represented a “voice not veto” for Russia. This co-operation or integration has been taken a notch higher with the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in May 2002 to deal with terrorist threats, crisis management, non-proliferation, arms control and confidence-building measures, theatre missile defence, search and rescue at sea, military-to-military co-operation, defence reform, civil emergency response, and new threats and

challenges (including scientific co-operation and airspace management). It is an index of Western confidence in Russian subordination that Robertson, the NATO Secretary-General, can now say in October 2002 that Russia is part of the solution, not of the problem, as he looks forward to more intensified collaboration in handling terror strikes and weapons of mass destruction among other issues of high priority to the West. And Putin had already declared in 2000 that Russia was prepared to join NATO.

NATO expansion in the first phase to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic was received with horror in Russia as Western betrayal and aggression. As the Democrats saw it then, NATO should have disbanded itself in response to the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. It was a "gentleman's agreement" as Gorbachev naively expressed it, and there were periodic reminders of the fate of the Weimar Republic; but such complaints fatally ignored the reality of victory and defeat in the Cold War. If NATO remained a threat, Russia suffered from reduced warning time for anti-ballistic missiles systems, the Russian cities of Kursk, Briansk, and Smolensk were highly vulnerable, the Russian Baltic Fleet was hemmed in with strategic Polish ports in hostile hands, and NATO tactical nuclear weapons could be deployed on the new territories so much closer to Russia. As if to illustrate the danger, NATO twice attacked in Yugoslavia, in the Bosnian War in 1995 and the Kosovo War in 1999 to the chagrin and outrage of Russia. While Russian public opinion was shocked beyond belief that their fellow Orthodox Slavs and anti-fascist brothers-in-arms were being hounded and bombed by the unholy alliance of Cold War and World War II foes, Russian strategists had concerns beyond such comradely sympathy. They were bothered that the West took unilateral decisions in an area in which Russia had declared her close interest; and they were anxious lest these become the first of a series of NATO interventions. Yet Russia has participated in NATO peacekeeping in both Bosnia and Kosovo although Russia's Serbian "brothers" are at a disadvantage in that process, a disadvantage that Russians expect to mitigate. Their presence is slender and something of a token, with just 1,200 out of 20,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina and 3,600 out of 40,000 in the Kosovo force (KFOR). It is a symbolism that satisfies both parties, the Russians that they are not isolated, and the West for having Russia hitched to their chariot.

Beyond such face-saving formulae, it is clear that Russia has had to participate in her own humiliation by acting as a very junior partner of the very foe she loudly denounced. The only analogy is Germany participating in all the causes of liberal democracy against totalitarianism which includes her own National Socialist past and any putative revivals. But Germany has been reconstructed by repudiating and being ceaselessly required to repudiate that nazi legacy; and post-War Germany presents 1945 as a victory over nazism, not over the Germany that exists today. Russian Democrats and the western ideological machines pursue a symmetrical argument with respect to Soviet socialism through totalitarian theory; but since the Cold War victory was not total in the manner of 1945, the fact of such an ideological victory has to be demonstrated until its meaning is fully internalized in Russia. Russian resistance and grumbling about NATO is an index of lessons not learnt and the need to drive the point home further. The defeat in the Cold War is not total and final as a single event, as 1945 was over fascism and nazism; it is instead processual.

Accordingly, the two seemingly contradictory processes go on simultaneously: NATO expansion apparently against Russia, and Russian integration into that same NATO. The continued

existence of NATO into the nineties, and therefore presumably of a further defeat and decline of Russia, saw a 40% Russian public opinion vote in favour of joining NATO and the Partnership for Peace, both in 1994. This helped in neutralizing Russian objections to both the unilateral NATO strike against Bosnia in September 1995 and the exclusion of Russia from jointly managing the Bosnian crisis, and in ensuring Russian participation in Bosnian peacekeeping from 1995. The admission of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic to NATO to the dismay of Russia was accompanied by the NATO-Russia Founding Act in May 1997 by which Russia secured a "voice not veto." The admission not only of Slovenia, Rumania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria, but also of the Soviet territory of the three Baltic Republics in November 2002 virtually coincides with the deeper Russian integration into NATO structures through the NATO-Russia Council of May 2002.

There is an evident convergence between Russian and Western strategists against their respective "diehards". The indefinite expansion of NATO to the extent of Russia joining it suggests the obsolescence of NATO by deliberate over extension; but it satisfies all those in search of security. Western triumphalists see Russia pushed to the wall apparently; East European states feel secure in NATO against Russian revanchism; and Russia feels reassured through inclusion in virtually all NATO structures. Such a gargantuan alliance is too flabby for effective offensive military action; but it can do all else like peacekeeping. Hence America is setting a new trend of acting virtually independently and cobbling together variable alliances for each campaign. Its action against Iraq in 1990 and 2003, Serbia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, were all based on ad hoc groupings assembled for the moment. In a sense then, Putin's policy, as indeed of Yeltsin, of turning an apparently unending defeat and decline into an advantage by merging with the victor, is paying dividends at one strategic level at least. The menace of NATO dwindles as it expands.

This outcome is not significantly qualified by a series of compensatory actions that Russia pursues. Thus both the Military Doctrine and the National Security Concept have been marginally revised to more aggressive postures in 2002 to emphasize the nuclear option. Massive military exercises like the West '99 have been carried out in response to simulated NATO attacks. The potential in the Russia-China-India triangle grouping is regularly investigated. The Shanghai Group has evolved steadily into a stable consultative forum for a sub-strategic level of Central Asian questions. The Commonwealth of Independent States, despite its hopelessly toothless nature, continues to function as a base for periodic ad hoc groupings put together by Russia. And Russia sustains a vigorous diplomacy and sometimes collaboration with what America has termed the "rogue states", now the "axis of evil', that is, Iraq, Iran, and North Korea. But every one of these pass under the overarching relation with the USA whose strategic priorities are never thwarted, not even in dealings with the "rogues."

IV

This master-slave dialectic of improvement through submission was demonstrated dramatically in Central Asia after the al-Qaeda attack on the USA in September 2001. In one swift move Russia invited the US to base itself militarily in Central Asia and to begin reorienting both the domestic politics and the geopolitics of the region. It at once achieved what Russia had not been able to achieve all these ten years. It rooted out the sources of jihad and terror in Afghanisatan, it brus-

quely dismissed Pakistani dreams of Curzonian strategic depth in Central Asia, and it compelled the US and its European auxiliaries to accept the Russian campaign in Chechnya. Russia and the US are now partners in a domain that is a strategic priority to both. But the price was severe, indeed almost the same as Russia has had to pay since perestroika. Russia lost exclusive rights in Central Asia, to become junior partner to the US in that vital region. The Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO), consisting of Russia, China, and four Central Asian states has given itself the main task of combating Islamic militancy, with the secondary objective of containing American hegemony. But, given the American leadership of the crusade against extremist Islam, this must function under American aegis, even if without direct American participation. Containing America, in such circumstances, must atrophy, even as pious statement. Russia had been excluded entirely from Europe and Yugoslavia, which was in fact her grievance; but is being readmitted gradually and most cautiously through NATO structures in a subordinate capacity. In Central Asia, the principle of joint management of crisis has been accepted from the outset, albeit under American leadership and with always an element of uncertainty whether it would mutate into American unilateralism. But Russia has derived some satisfaction from the fact of both joint management and the freedom it permitted in Chechnya.

The US is now in a position to do in the Near Abroad what it has managed these fifteen years in Europe. It oscillated between excluding Russia from the region by direct "management" or functioning through Russia. The depth of the Russian presence did not make it easy to exclude Russia in the manner it had been from Europe. The patented US instrument for the purpose was human rights and civil society, or the proliferation of non-state actors in the political realm, which permits penetration by US and European organizations in infinite series against the far more limited Russian or other local resources to do the same. But this also included the dangerously double-edged one of jihad based in Pakistan and Afghanistan, useful in part because of its yeoman service in defeating the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and possibly of use by extension in the region generally to douse Russian great power aspirations. Partnership with Russia was more pragmatic and stable, but Russia resisted for long on the ground that this was a traditional sphere of Russian influence. Unilateral American action in the area would have aroused Russian hostility on a scale greater than in Yugoslavia. The al-Qaeda attack on America converted Russian opinion, both official and of the public, into accepting the American presence. The USA has profited enormously in strategic terms from the terrorist attack on itself; Russia also has, but to a lesser extent. The European pattern of Russian co-ordination with the US has now extended to the Russian soft underbelly.

Islamic militancy is likely to remain a decisive factor in the near future. In the absence of a universal redemptive creed like socialism, this becomes a potent instrument against the seemingly eternal profanity and humiliating domination of the West. Roman Catholicism grew into such a role in East Europe, chiefly Poland and Lithuania, against Orthodox and imperial Russia and Soviet socialism. Not surprisingly, Roman Catholicism and Islam were deployed to enormous effect against Soviet domination. East European Roman Catholicism could be comfortably integrated into the structures of European civil society since that process had already taken place through the secularization of the western world in the nineteenth century. It delivered Poland and Lithuania from bondage in East Europe and vindicated the Cold War campaigns of West Europe. Those same structures however appeared in much of the Islamic world as the perpetuation of de-

privation and of cultural humiliation. Islamic militancy is one of the reflections of the parochialism of socialism and of liberalism, of the post-modern doctrines of emancipation, and of the asymmetries of world-wide development. At the same time, Islam is being constructed as the principal challenger to what is described as Western civilization and its loudly trumpeted values of freedom and democracy and to substitute for communism which had discharged that function until the end of the Cold War. Islam has been cast in a role that makes it a target and compels it to fulfil itself as one despite itself. The latest version of civilization theory at the hands of Samuel Huntington, regurgitated yet again after the Cold War despite more than a century of damaging criticism of its inadequacies, has accorded to Islam that dubious honour.

The strategy has been sharply focused by isolating a posited militant essence to Islam, discerning its universal manifestations, and calling for a world-wide crusade against it. Putin preceded Bush in this matter by identifying such isomorphous groups throughout the Islamic world from Indonesia, through Kashmir, Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Arab countries to Chechnya. After the al-Qaeda attack in September 2001, Bush has transmitted that same message with all the resources of the US at his command. They now use the same language of instructions to their military chiefs, employ the same rhetoric, and pursue the same easily identifiable enemy. Russia has accepted subordination in Central Asia also; but she has the satisfaction of seeing the fulfilment of one set of strategic objectives, the end to Islamic militancy in the region, even as it surrenders another set, that of hegemony. On the other hand in Europe Russia experienced only surrender of positions to NATO, not fulfilment of objectives. Islamic militancy and terror have perhaps united America and Russia far beyond what the rhetoric of "universal human values" and "Our Common European Home" ever did.

V

Russia being embroiled with terror and Islamic militancy brings us to the question of Chechnya. On the face of it this should not have been a strategic issue at all, even as an insurgency. It can not threaten the existence of Russia or of any vital interest; and it should have remained a local insurgency, however incompetent and corrupt the Russian army had become to deal with it. But even this has passed under the over-riding US-Russia relationship in two ways.

The first was the possibility of the West using Chechnya as leverage against Russia. This is occurring on a muted scale through the usual human rights interventions. Radio Liberty broadcasts to Chechnya, Chechen offices and conferences function in Europe, and Chechen guerillas find safe haven and passage for their arms supplies in Georgia. Given her numerous approaches to the West, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, and her keenness to join NATO, Georgia is very open to suggestion by the West. These tensions between Russia and the West through Georgia and Chechnya locate them as it were in the traditional spheres of US-Russia relations and great power politics.

The second is the Islamic militancy which has added a twist to the complex story. Chechnya is largely Muslim, but the insurgency is essentially a secular one that exploits the politics and criminal establishment in Moscow and elsewhere to good effect. But Russia is a common target to

jihadis from Central Asia and Afghanistan and to Chechen insurgents. In search of funding, guerillas have made good use of the mafia in Moscow, but also of financiers from the Islamic world. The jihad has thus spilled into Chechnya also; and Moscow has long been trying to persuade the rest of the world that Russia is fighting that hydra in Chechnya. September 2001 made that case so much more persuasive; but the US was less ready still to accept it as such than to strike a bargain with Moscow that they would limit human rights criticisms for the sake of support in the new Afghan war. The Russian case advanced a step farther when in February 2002 the US announced that al-Qaeda had found shelter in Georgia, in the Pankisi Gorge, which Russia had always denounced as a hideout for Chechen terrorists. It has led to US commitments in the region beyond pipeline politics and leverage against Moscow. At once two hundred US men began training a Georgian Rapid Deployment Force of 1500 men and border guards of 500 to gain control of the Pankisi Gorge and root out al-Qaeda. The Pankisi itself is set about 70 km deep into Georgia and has been maintained by the Georgian security and interior ministries as a safe haven for organized crime by never entering the area themselves but extracting bribes at the entrance. Chechens are free there, not so much due to the malevolence of the Georgian government as to the criminality of its administration. This growing identity of interest between the US and Russia has been further consolidated by the Chechen hostage taking crisis in Moscow in October 2002 leaving 118 Russians and all 50 Chechens dead. To the European and American public at least, Russia and the West were fighting the same cause. The Bali bombing merely further reinforced the same point.

As long as the same groups are targeting Western and Russian interests, Russia secures important support in her campaign in Chechnya. But once again, it has both led to and exposed Russian dependence on US priorities. Russia has not been able to develop the capacity to stamp out the Chechen insurgency, whether politically or militarily; her army is too ill-equipped, ill-trained and corrupt to be able to do so; and Russian politics exerts its baleful influence here. It has often been reported that the insurgents buy their arms from underpaid Russian forces; and dissident Russian political manipulators, financiers, and others are engaged in Chechnya to embarrass opponents in Moscow. The US has rushed in to help Georgia against al-Qaeda, but not Russia; it is doing no more than toning down its propaganda machine; and Russia remains highly vulnerable to low-key western interventions. Chechnya, which is within Russia, has been subjected to the logic of the Central Asian pattern: Russia may protect her security interest and escape being marginalized only by surrendering larger claims and integrating with the US. Having made that strategic choice, she would be permitted room for manoeuvre in institutional and commercial competitions.

VI

There are however three areas in which Russia would appear to be independent of such US hegemony: these are with respect to the “rogues”, and to China, and India.

Putin has been ostentatious about his friendship and collaboration with Iraq, Iran, and North Korea; and these appear to be traditional Russian self-assertion and challenges to the hyperpower of the US. It should be evident at the outset that such a thesis is untenable. When Russia must surrender positions in vital spheres like NATO expansion, the European Union, Yugoslavia, Central

Asia, Transcaucasia and Chechnya, why should she exert herself in these marginal areas which are calculated to provoke fits of apoplexy in the US? Briefly put, Russia is merely manoeuvring for a better negotiating position.

To take the Iraq case first. Iraq owed Russia 11-12 billion US dollars dating from Soviet times, and Russia regularly reminded the world that any US action in Iraq would have to take care of Iraqi debts to Russia. To reinforce the case, Russia entered into some 67 agreements with Iraq worth some 40 to 60 billion US dollars in August 2002. Iraq does not have the capacity to pay for such projects and Russia was concluding such agreements on the eve of a major war. Iraq could possibly calculate that the enormous scope of the agreements would stimulate Russia into attempting to ward off or soften the US blow about to be delivered. Russia would likewise reckon that it could demand compensation from the US after the war. On the other hand, were Saddam Hussain to be removed without the regime being changed but emerging from the doghouse, Russia would have benefited by having concluded so many agreements.

Russian collaboration with Iran would appear to be more offensive to the US. Russia has been helping in nuclear energy generation. It could be a test of US opposition; it could also be to make the US offer compensation, whether now or later when Iran is subjected to the same fate as Iraq in the "axis of evil." The US has indeed already offered compensation and negotiated with Russia to help her industry and keep her off Iran. For example the U.S. offered to help dismantle obsolete submarines and reduce chemical weapons stockpiles; to buy Russian "Afghan" helicopters of the Mi-8 variety; to pay $20 billion for reprocessing nuclear waste over the next twenty years; and NASA addressed the space lobby by suggesting payment for the services of Russians on the International Space Agency. But all these were tied to Russia getting out of agreements with Iran. Russia has been essentially bargaining in domains where she can bargain; it should not be confused with strategic moves, at least not at the present.

VII

Russian relations with China have been dramatically improving, especially since 1995, and with further energetic action by Putin. It is now called a strategic partnership, and the partners regularly call for a multipolar world in lieu of the unipolar world dominated by the US. But besides demilitarization, arms reductions, border demarcations, the driving force of the relationship has been trade in arms and defence technologies, Russia supplying and China taking. Industrial collaboration is of limited significance because China is not attempting to upgrade its ancient Soviet industry, in which Russia could have played a role; instead China is starting from scratch in modern high technology industries by importing from the West, for example aeroplanes from Boeing or Airbus, not Tupolev, and collaboration with General Motors or Audi, not Lada. In the energy sector however there is a complementarity of interests, Russia exporting gas and oil to a China that requires ever greater volumes of such energy for modernization. Trade in arms and defence technologies is however the bond between them. China is the biggest importer of both, and Russia maintains a vigorous trade in the one sector that is internationally competititve. Russia sees herself as about fifteen years ahead of China in such capabilities and therefore is sanguine for the moment. Some aspects of the trade could be directed against the US also within narrow li-

mits. The most important purchases are SU-27 and SU-30 aircraft, S-300 anti-aircraft missiles, and Sovremenny destroyers. Of these the Sovremenny destroyers would be especially significant against US aircraft carriers near Taiwan should the need arise. This relationship seems to be substantially commercial rather than strategic; if it has strategic implications, it will be more a source of worry to Russia herself than to the US. Both are keenly aware of the importance of bilateral relations with the US; and the talk of a "strategic relationship" and of the multipolar world is more an instance of expanding room for manoeuvre rather than of challenging the US. This is however once instance of Russia breaking out of the overarching Russia-US relation, in that Russia is not here obliged to improve her prospects by subordinating to the US and then working her way up.

The other one is with India. This is the oldest, most stable, and most independent relationship that Russia enjoys. But like the Chinese, this has also become a chiefly commercial one after its Cold War status as a genuinely strategic association. Again, India is a major importer of arms and sundry technologies in the nuclear, space, and other crucial science and technology fields. As in the case of China, here also the bilateral relationship with the USA takes precedence over all others, including such a tried and tested one as this. This is not to suggest any deterioration; indeed relations are of the best and there is little reason for them to be otherwise; but the international context has shifted them from the strategic to the chiefly commercial. In these circumstances, one important development is likely to occur. Russia has privileged the ties with India over anything with Pakistan owing to the strategic factor during the Cold War, and that has substantially continued to this day. However, given the sweeping integration into American priorities, and if America can conduct excellent bilateral relations with both India and Pakistan, Russia is very likely to want to do the same. This is possible because the main strategic question of the binary choices of the Cold War is out of the way; it is also attractive because Pakistan opens up commercial possibilities, which Russia is desperately in need of at the moment. But this will not be at the expense of good relations with India, which Russia would want to maintain rather than jeopardize. It merely follows the general logic of Russia strategic calculations the world over.