

The Foreign Policy Centre



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Political Change in Russia: Implications for Britain

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Preface by Robin Cook

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The views in this paper are not necessarily those of the Foreign Policy Centre.

About the Future of Russia Project

This pamphlet is the first in the Foreign Policy Centre's 'Future of Russia' project which will be built around seminars, lectures, publications, media contributions and larger conferences on the future of liberal and pluralist democracy in Russia. The project will take recent Russian developments and Russian perspectives as its departure point, but ground these in the broad principles of democracy and the commitments of Russia under its adherence both to the Council of Europe and OSCE founding documents. The main purposes of the Future of Russia Project will be to expose to wider media scrutiny the reversal of hard-won freedoms in Russia and to address the foreign policy dilemma faced by UK leaders in relations with Russia as a result. That dilemma is how to protect and promote democratic principles in practice in the face of the visible retrenchment of basic freedoms in Russia, at the same time as advancing more traditional economic, security or geopolitical interests. The work of the Future of Russia Project will be directed to making sound policy recommendations for action, followed up with appropriate public dissemination, especially through seminars and media coverage.

The Future of Russia Project will feature prominent figures from Russian progressive politics, as well as leading specialists and policy advisers from around the world. The project will concentrate on the mechanisms by which Western governments, especially the UK, can revitalise the question of Russian democratic governance as one of the central issues of European politics today.

About the Foreign Policy Centre

The Foreign Policy Centre is a leading European think tank launched under the patronage of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair to develop a vision of a fair and rule-based world order. Through our research, publications and events, we aim to develop innovative policy ideas which promote:

- Effective multilateral solutions to global problems
- Democratic and well-governed states as the foundation of order and development
- Partnerships with the private sector to deliver public goods
- Support for progressive policy through effective public diplomacy
- Inclusive definitions of citizenship to underpin internationalist policies.

The Foreign Policy Centre has produced a range of **Publications** by key thinkers on world order, the role of non-state actors in policymaking, the future of Europe, international security and identity. These include *The Post-Modern State and the World Order* by Robert Cooper, *Network Europe* and *Public Diplomacy* by Mark Leonard, *NGOs Rights and Responsibilities* by Michael Edwards, *Trading Identities* by Wally Olins and *Third Generation Corporate Citizenship* by Simon Zadek.

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Preface

The launch of the Foreign Policy Centre's Future of Russia Project should be welcomed by anyone who values serious discussion about the issues that really matter in contemporary world affairs.

Russia is a country that policy makers cannot ignore. The size of its population, the vast extent of its territory, the huge potential of its mineral wealth and the uniqueness of its geopolitical position astride some of the most unstable regions of two continents, mean that Russia has the capacity to influence global events for good or bad. It is very much in our interests that it should be a force for good.

The need to take a close interest in Russia has never been greater. The 'end of history' triumphalism that greeted the dismantling of the Iron Curtain encouraged complacency about the durability of political and economic reform in many post-Soviet societies. The assumption that, once started, the reform process would produce a seamless transition to western style liberal democracy has been repudiated by the facts. In particular, the exposure of ordinary people to the harsher aspects of 'shock therapy' privatisation has produced a legacy of cynicism about the applicability of democratic values in a Russian context that is having a negative effect on the direction of contemporary Russian politics.

That President Putin should wish to restore the authority of the Russian state in implementing a coherent political programme was understandable. But there are now worrying signs that his reforms are moving far beyond those needed to establish effective mechanisms of governance and are leading instead to a serious regression from democratic standards.

The Russian government is this month abolishing elections for the governorships of its 89 provinces and equivalent administrative units. In future, these posts will be appointed directly by the President. This move is part of a wider trend in which political

pluralism, freedom of expression, human rights and the rule of law have come under sustained pressure.

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons reported in 2000, and in May 2000 as Foreign Secretary I endorsed the view, that Russia's protection of basic human rights would affect the sort of bilateral relationship it could expect with Britain. That was just five months after Vladimir Putin came to office. The shrinking of democratic space in Russia since then has been marked. It is now time that we in Britain and in Europe examined the policies needed to re-engage Russia in finding a path to modernisation of a democratic rather than an authoritarian character.

This must be undertaken in a spirit of friendship and constructive support. It is important to avoid glib judgments that ignore the particular political, social and economic conditions in Russia. No one set of political structures is appropriate for all countries at all times. Russia certainly has a number of chronic problems that it needs to address in its own way. But there are grounds for real anxiety that Russia is turning away from political pluralism and representative government to a degree that will prove irreversible for many years. It is particularly worrying that support for democratic values appears to be weakest amongst young Russians.

The Future of Russia Project will be an important contribution to British and European debate on the recent changes in Russia and their broader implications. I hope that it will stimulate greater levels of interest in Parliament, government, the media and the wider public.

Robin Cook, MP

President

The Foreign Policy Centre

Executive Summary

Russia is a 'weak authoritarian state with nuclear weapons'. If recent trends continue, the question of Russian democratic governance may become one of the central issues of European politics. Key political reforms put in place after Boris Yeltsin was first elected as President of the Russian Republic in June 1991 have been reversed in the five years of the Presidency of Vladimir Putin, who was first appointed to the post on 31 December 1999 after Yeltsin stepped down.

There is no doubt that the political changes in Russia in recent years, particularly the rise in assassination of journalists and the concentration of media ownership, alongside the weakening of the multi-party system and strengthening of individual rule by the President, represent a fundamental break from any model of liberal democracy and its values. History teaches us that such breaks, if anything more than temporary, are in and of themselves a fundamental threat to the survival of a democratic system in the country concerned.

The crack-down and new discipline, reportedly so admired by the Russian electorate, has come at a price. Putin remains immensely popular.¹ Views outside Russia as to what the changes under Putin represent differ in emphasis. The spectrum of views ranges from softer tones, like 'managed democracy' or 'guided democracy' (from people inclined to give Putin the benefit of the doubt), to a more strident critique in words like 'authoritarianism' and 'democratic dictatorship' (from people who feel Putin's actions and omissions have malign intent or largely negative effect).

While Putin may not be individually responsible for all of the negative changes and events, as President of Russia, he will have to be responsible for bringing about a reversal of the anti-democratic trend.

¹ Interviews with Russian political scientists, November 2004.

Whatever the motivations, the curbs on press freedom and the weakening of the multi-party system cannot be allowed to stand. Russia must move quickly to enforce the rule of law and protect individual civil rights. The UK should apply whatever leverage it possesses (including through multilateral economic co-operation agreements) to vigorously promote the protection of the hard-won rights and freedoms in Russia.

There are five good reasons for urgent action:

- ❑ in the long run, illiberal means are inconsistent with liberal goals
- ❑ totalitarian regimes normally become so by incremental means
- ❑ states moving from democratic to authoritarian or vice versa are more of a threat to peace than states that are stable democracies or stable dictatorships
- ❑ Putin's pro-western policies do not have strong support within Russia's security elites
- ❑ Russia has inadequate controls over some of its weapons of mass destruction or related materials.

The UK should focus on enhancing its capacities in five principal areas of policy:

- ❑ public scrutiny of the Russian situation in the light of its commitments in European institutions
- ❑ use of high level channels and quiet diplomacy
- ❑ use of leverage available from multilateral lending agencies
- ❑ use of Western media and proxy organisations, such as NGOs and community groups, in order to open up debate about UK and European interests in Russia's political developments
- ❑ increased direct and indirect support to champions of liberal pluralism in Russia.

Britain's enhanced response must vigorously address the wider conditions of Russia and not limit itself to the necessary public defence of Russia's democratic institutions. This can only require

significant additional resources in analysis and public attention, ministerial time and financial resources.

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Introduction

In population size (140 million), it is the fifth biggest country in the world, after China, India, the USA and Indonesia. Russia is bigger than any other European state, though most of the territory ruled from Moscow is in Asia (about 75 per cent). Russia occupies about one eighth of the land territory on the planet. It shares land borders with fourteen states, along 20,139 km and has a coastline of 37,653 km. Russia shares maritime borders with some of its land neighbours but also with the USA and Japan.

Russia's economy remains severely affected by the hyper-depression and other crises of the 1990s, in spite of impressive GDP growth since 1999. The annual growth rate for 2004 is likely to be about seven per cent (based on data to the end of September). A recent IMF assessment concluded that in the light of strong oil prices worldwide, Russia's large international reserves and low public debt, GDP growth 'would remain robust over the near term' and that 'external vulnerabilities would likely remain low'.² The main note of caution, however, was that 'further turmoil in the banking system could damage confidence'.

Yet national GDP for Russia in 2003, measured in purchasing power parity terms, was only about a quarter that of the UK.³ For 2003, Russia was ranked 16th in national GDP, but 97th in per capita national income. According to a variety of sources, some 20 to 25 per cent of Russia's people live below its national poverty line. Russia remains a troubled country, with high levels of corruption, thriving organised crime, regular political assassinations and a serious terrorist insurgency that takes a regular, sometimes high, death-toll on Russian citizens. This last aspect, the Chechen insurgency, puts Russia squarely on the battle-front against the Al

Qaeda-inspired Islamist terrorism that has launched attacks in New York, Bali and Madrid with large-scale loss of life.

In this troubling domestic and global environment, the responses of the Russian government and the Russian electorate have been predictably and understandably firm. The Putin Administration, in place now for almost five years, has cracked down on crime and terrorism and sought to restore order and predictability to the society. The last few years have seen a strong resurgence of the Russian economy and with it some return of prosperity and some return of Russian political influence in its near abroad. Through successive Presidential elections and a range of national and local level elections, Russian voters have backed what they see as Putin's firm and successful approach to the country's big problems and the restoration of Russian international respect and influence.

The crack-down and new discipline so admired by the Russian electorate has come at a price. Views differ in emphasis, but the majority of Russian and international commentators now see governance in Russia as quite different from the liberal democracy foreshadowed in the first Yeltsin years and in his 1993 Constitution. Russian governance is also quite distant from visions of liberal democracy as practised in Europe, the Americas and Asia (India, Japan, Taiwan). The spectrum of views ranges from softer tones, like 'managed democracy' or 'guided democracy' to 'authoritarianism' and 'democratic dictatorship'.

According to Michael McFaul, a leading American specialist, 'Russia's political system has become less pluralistic on Putin's watch ... Putin has done nothing to strengthen democratic institutions and much to weaken them still further'.⁴ McFaul refers to the following developments in the Putin years:

- Putin's assertion of control of major national television networks

² International Monetary Fund, PIN No. 04/112, 30 September 2004, 'IMF Concludes 2004 Article IV Consultation with the Russian Federation', <http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pn/2004/pn04112.htm>.

³ See <http://www.worldbank.org/data/databytopic>.

⁴ Michael McFaul, 'Russia's Glass is Half Full and Leaking', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Originally published by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 15, 2004, available online at <http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/2004-03-15-mcfaul-ferl.asp?from=pubdate>.

- the turning of both the Federation Council and State Duma into rubber stamps
- the subordination of once powerful regional leaders
- arbitrary use of law enforcement structures to jail or send into exile political foes
- removal of candidates from ballots; rigging regional elections
- harassing and arresting human rights activists, outspoken journalists, and environmental leaders and
- weakening Russia's independent political parties and civil society.

McFaul also notes that the 14 March 2004 presidential vote was the least competitive election in Russia's post-communist history. He says: 'If, as alleged, more than 1 million voters disappeared from the registers between December and 14 March, it will also rank as one of the least fair'. Putin has himself asserted that 'the stronger the state, the freer the individual'.⁵

There is no doubt that the political changes in Russia in recent years, particularly the rise in assassination of journalists and the concentration of media ownership, alongside the weakening of the multi-party system and strengthening of individual rule by the President, represent a fundamental break from any model of liberal democracy and its values. History teaches us that such breaks, if anything more than temporary, are in and of themselves a fundamental threat to the survival of a democratic system in the country concerned.

This pamphlet traces the political origins of the turn to authoritarianism in Russia under President Putin. It gives special emphasis to the decade of change in democratic Russia under Yeltsin because it was possible even in 1999 when he stood down to see that the more likely course for Russia in coming years would be authoritarian rather than liberal.⁶ This pamphlet is not principally about Putin. As central as he is to the scene, it is about a bigger set

⁵ Vladimir Putin, 'Open Letter by Vladimir Putin to Russian Voters', 25 February 2004, available online at <http://www.ticketsofrussia.ru/gov/putin/letter.html>.

⁶ See Greg Austin, *The Armed Forces of Russia in Asia*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2000.

of social, institutional, political and economic conditions that have created the circumstances that have either given rise to or been used to justify the threats to Russia's fragile democratic system.

In its final sections, the pamphlet addresses the implications for Britain of these developments in Russia. Britain's enhanced response must vigorously address the wider conditions of Russia and not limit itself to the necessary public defence of Russia's democratic institutions. This can only require significant additional resources in analysis and public attention, ministerial time and financial resources.

Russian Prosperity: the Yeltsin Roller-Coaster

Russia is one of the most resource-rich and self-sufficient countries in the world in terms of natural resources, with the largest reserves of natural gas (45 per cent of world share), the third largest reserves of coal (23 per cent of world share), and one of the largest reserves of oil outside the Middle East. It is in the top five producers for iron ore, gold, zinc, copper, lead, mercury, nickel and hydropower. One might have reasonably expected that this underlying wealth and the existing industrial infrastructure of the country would provide fairly solid foundations for economic prosperity of the new Russian state. But this proved not to be the case.

In 1992, the government began to immediately pursue a rigid economic strategy based on the rejection of a social safety net (social democracy) in favour of almost absolute faith in 'real liberalism' – a belief that abolition of the market constraints of communism and rapid privatisation would lead to a positive improvement in general welfare in a short time frame.⁷ On 2 January 1992, the government lifted controls on most prices and on wages,

⁷ Bertram Silverman and Murray Yanowitch, *New Rich, New Poor, New Russia – Winners and Losers on the Russian Road to Capitalism*, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk NY, 1997, pp.129, 137.

and introduced a floating exchange rate as part of the 'shock therapy' approach to achieving economic stabilisation.⁸

The policies were so severe that they soon came to be dubbed 'shock without therapy'.⁹ The results included an increase of 245 per cent in the consumer price index (CPI) for the first month, which stabilised at about a 10 per cent monthly increase in August, before taking off again to a monthly 25 per cent before the end of 1992. By the end of 1992, prices had increased on average by 2,200 per cent while wages had increased on average by only 1,000 per cent.¹⁰ Real income in 1992 was about one third of the 1985 level.¹¹

By 1993, there were 40 million Russians below the poverty line.¹² Government salaries and pensions dropped significantly in value. Consumer prices rose more steeply. Groups affected most sharply included white collar workers such as doctors and teachers, while some blue collar groups, especially miners, were able to fare better. But for the most part, it has been blue collar workers who have lost their jobs.

By 1994, the supply of goods began to stabilise because of the lifting of state price controls and because of sharp drops in income. According to Russian government statistics, the proportion of the population below the poverty line had fallen from 39 per cent in 1992 to 26 per cent.¹³ Women were the big losers in the rapid decline in daily living standards. They constituted some 70 per cent of the poor and extremely poor, but only 27 per cent of the most prosperous section of the community.¹⁴

⁸ Harriet Matejka, 'Macroeconomic Equilibrium – Not Without the Market?', in *Today's Russia in Transition*, ed. Curt Gasteyger, Geneva Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 1994, p.52.

⁹ Georgy Arbatov, 'A Neo-Bolshevik Brand of Capitalism', *International Herald Tribune*, 12 May 1992.

¹⁰ Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 2nd ed, Routledge, London, 1996 p.234.

¹¹ Michael Kaiser, 'Economic Transition and Political Stability: One or the Other?', in *Today's Russia in Transition*, ed. Curt Gasteyger, Geneva Institute of International Studies, Geneva, 1994, p.7.

¹² *Ibid.* p.9.

¹³ Silverman and Yanowitch, *New Rich, New Poor, New Russia*, p.47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 67.

The depth and time period over which the Russian economic collapse occurred mean that under Yeltsin the country suffered a hyper-depression. The people of Russia were to see a collapse in their economy some 100 per cent worse than the great depression of 1929. Between 1990 and 1995, the net decline in GDP of Russia was roughly 50 per cent.¹⁵

By 1997 the Russian economy had, it appeared, seen the worst. The extreme drops in GDP and productivity of the 1990s were not to be repeated. By early 1998, the IMF was claiming some success for its programs in Russia and hailing the stabilisation achieved by the Russian government: 'inflation has declined—from nearly 50 per cent in 1996 to about 15 per cent in 1997; the exchange rate had stayed within its predetermined band; and the balance of payments has remained broadly favourable'.¹⁶

Yet, in spite of some rebalancing in the macro-economy between 1995 and 1997, there was little let up in the personal economic pain for most ordinary Russians. In mid-1997, the federal government foreshadowed moves to scrap a number of the social welfare benefits that had survived from the Soviet era, in part because it could no longer afford to pay for them but also because there was no means test on the recipients. Arrears in social payments reached 12.5 trillion roubles in pensions, 13 trillion roubles in government workers' salaries, and 8 trillion roubles in child support.¹⁷ The currency was not trusted, and many Russians kept their savings in US dollars. Life expectancy continued to fall, reaching 54 for men by 1998.¹⁸ By 1997, Russia dropped to 16th place in the world in GDP.¹⁹

¹⁵ See Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Paige Sullivan, (eds), *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents, Data and Analysis*, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk NY, 1997, p.811.

¹⁶ Michel Camdessus, 'Russia and the IMF: Meeting the Challenges of an Emerging Market and Transition Economy', Address to the US-Russia Business Council, Washington DC, 1 April 1998.

¹⁷ Interfax, 13 May 1997.

¹⁸ Norman Stone, 'Can Russia Survive the Horrors that Lie Ahead', *The Independent*, 18 August 1997.

Then in 1998, a financial crisis hit Russia in late August and September, forcing Russia back to the IMF for urgent support and negotiated stand-by financing of US\$11.2 billion, announced on 17 August. By late 1998, the economy had started to decline again, with the IMF predicting negative growth of one per cent for 1998.²⁰ The government had not been able to repair its shaky tax system. The tax base shrank in the first part of the 1990s because of the large declines in production²¹ but continued to deteriorate because of the lack of effective tax enforcement.²²

By the end of April 1999, most Russian economic indicators were down on the previous year, especially industrial and agricultural production. Unemployment levels had also risen.²³ Inflation was stabilising (2-3 per cent per month in March and April), and there had been some climb back in production in the first quarter of 1999. But indicators of standards of living had fallen, the ruble exchange rate had slid further, and real incomes were still falling. There was no joy for most Russian people in the economic fortunes of their country through 1998 and 1999.

The very sorry state of Yeltsin's popularity at this time—he scored only 7 per cent support—was a very reliable indicator of the lack of legitimacy of his government in the eyes of the Russian people. There was an attempt at impeaching the President.

¹⁹ Aleksei Arbatov, 'The National Idea and National Security', *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 5, 1998, pp. 5-21, FBIS-SOV-98-208, 27 July 1998: 'Russia: Arbatov on New National Security Approach'.

²⁰ *IMF Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 3 August 1998, pp.238-9.

²¹ Kaiser, 'Economic Transition and Political Stability: One or the Other?', p.9.

²² A vicious cycle had emerged involving non-payment by government agencies for their consumption coupled with demands from the government for tax based on the profits of firms to which the government was indebted.

²³ See Russian Central Bank Statistics, www.cbr.ru/dp accessed 24 May 1999.

Democratic Values in a Weak State: 1991 to 1993

At the end of December 1991, Moscow was demoralised and confused. The Soviet Union, a country in whose name the people had suffered so much and to which they had given so much, had ceased to exist almost overnight. The former international empire of the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, had collapsed in 1989 along with the Berlin Wall, after a series of revolts and democratic elections. Millions of Russians were stranded in other republics and other Warsaw Pact countries. Many people were confused as to their new citizenship status, particularly those with parents of differing nationalities. The old values of Soviet society had already been swept aside by the leadership, and many of the people were struggling to catch up.

The transition for Russia was not going to be easy. The slate could not be wiped clean. There was an extremely bitter history to deal with, along with a complex web of economic and social relationships. Most importantly, many who rebelled in 1991 to finally defeat the USSR in its battle with Russian independence did not see themselves as revolutionaries until the coup attempts of 1991 began. They had no plans for the future, only a clear consciousness of what they opposed. The revolution of 1991 had been an ad hoc radicalisation of a program of gradual liberalisation, for which there had been little detail, little community consultation, and therefore no broad social consensus. It was a multi-dimensional 'insurgency',²⁴ a 'chaotic revolution from below' that had co-opted an impulse for reform from the regime.²⁵

But the revolution did have some vision of a way forward even if it was unelaborated: it was for Russia to be a normal, civilised country

²⁴ Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, p.77.

²⁵ T.H. Rigby, 'Conclusion: Russia in Search of Its Future', in *Russia in Search of its Future*, eds Amin Saikal and William Maley, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.211.

with a mixed economy.²⁶ The revolution marked the return to Russian politics of a philosophy of hope and a commitment to enlightened government that had eluded the people of Russia for most of the previous seven decades. But hope, like principle, is only a beacon in the distance.

There was serious competition within Russia for a new national identity: the new Russia was 'in search of the very fundamentals of statehood: frontiers, legitimacy, national identity, political institutions, and an economic system'.²⁷ The struggle over national identity was closely related to the contest over political order for the new Russia. Who would rule the new Russia and on what terms? And here the country was not well-placed. As Rigby has pointed out, the socio-economic foundations which had supported successful transitions from totalitarianism to democracy in other countries like Spain, Portugal and Chile did not exist in Russia. They had to be 'created at the same time as democracy itself' and 'in a context where not even the national basis of the state' was agreed.²⁸

The first major battle in the political war over domestic constitutional order was won by Yeltsin in October 1993 only after he used force to end a stand-off with the parliament that had been elected (like him) in 1989 in the Russian Republic of the USSR. Yeltsin had dismissed the parliament because it had become dominated by former communists and other conservatives opposed to his radical programs.

Constitution 1993: Repositioning Individual and State

As a result of this violent confrontation, a new Constitution was adopted and the 'first genuine multi-party elections' were held in Russia.²⁹ When the new Constitution was approved in 1993, the

²⁶ Ibid. p.210.

²⁷ Marie Mendras, 'Existe-t-il un Etat russe?', *politique étrangère*, 1992, No. 1, p.33.

²⁸ Rigby, 'Conclusion: Russia in Search of Its Future', p.208.

²⁹ Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, p.85.

authorities laid down in the preamble important markers for what they saw as elements of the desirable new national identity, but the proposed identity was sufficiently broad to contain something for most political forces in Russia – communists and ultra-nationalists, as well as liberal democrats:

'We, the multinational people of the Russian Federation, united by a common destiny on our land, asserting human rights and freedoms and civil peace and concord, preserving historically established state unity, ... revering the memory of our forebears who passed down to us love and respect for the Fatherland and faith in goodness and justice, reviving the sovereign statehood of Russia and asserting the immutability of its democratic foundations, seeking to ensure the well-being and prosperity of Russia, proceeding from our responsibility for our homeland to present and future generations, recognising ourselves as part of the world community, ...'³⁰

One essential difference between the USSR and the emerging new Russia was a widely accepted need to re-order the relationship between the rights of the individual person in relation to the exercise of state power. The 1993 Constitution provides protections of the individual similar to those found in the English *Magna Carta* (1215) and Bill of Rights (1689). But the emergence of democratic liberalism in Russia between 1991 and 1993 had taken place under the influence of '*nomenklatura* politics', with former beneficiaries of the Soviet system as the main players. Freedom of speech and genuinely multi-party elections in 1993 led to the emergence of effective pluralism and mass participation. But as in any society, access to the most effective instruments of political power is heavily influenced by access to economic resources.

³⁰ For English text, see Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, pp.395-429.

While the vision of a just society based on the rule of law is enshrined in the 1993 Constitution, the rule of law in Russia has been particularly weak. The influence of organised crime gangs on the police and court system has been one of the most serious problems. Human rights abuses in Russia at the hands of officials remain quite serious although these do not occur on anything near the scale that existed under the Soviet regime.

Ideas among the people in Russia about the type of state they see themselves living in are varied but these have not moved as sharply from those of the Soviet era as those represented in the Constitution suggest. This is reflected in continued support among a majority of voters, as demonstrated in election results and opinion polls, for older visions of a welfare state in which public order and personal security are dictated from above, and can be taken for granted. Most voters in Russia do not like the insecurity of having to compete for jobs in a deteriorating free market economy, and most do not like the threats to public order that have accompanied the free market reforms and the democratic liberalisation in the decade since 1989.

Constitutional Provision for a Strong Presidency

In Article 80, the 1993 Constitution provides for a very powerful President, who is 'guarantor of the Constitution ... and of human and civil rights and freedoms'; who 'determines the basic guidelines of the state's domestic and foreign policy'; who is head of state and the leader in national security policy. Article 87 makes the president commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Legislation passed by the parliament can be vetoed by the President, but the veto can be overturned if two-thirds of the total number of deputies in the lower house vote for the rejected bill again (Article 107.3).

The Constitution provides for a bicameral parliament, called the Federal Assembly, made up of two chambers – a lower house, the State Duma, with 450 deputies, and an upper house, the Federation Council, with 180 members, made up of two representatives from each of the 89 component units of Russia, one representative of the

Federal Assembly and one from the President. The term of the State Duma is set in the Constitution, while the 'procedure for forming the Federation Council' is established in federal laws, not in the Constitution (Article 96). In the Federation Council, the two representatives of each of the 89 units is elected but in 1995, the size of the Council was doubled when a law was introduced making the governor of each unit and the head of its legislature *ex-officio* members.³¹

The Constitution is explicitly rooted in the principle of separation of powers, with each branch (legislative, executive and judicial) guaranteed 'independence'. Provision is made for a Constitutional Court, as well as a Supreme Court, the latter being the highest court for the hearing of criminal, civil and administrative cases.

Relations between the various arms of the Russian government have not been stable, as various political forces struggled to exploit whatever position of power they might occupy. For example, in 1997, there were disputes over the role of the upper house, the Council of the Federation, in amending the annual budget; and over the relationship between local municipal councils and their regional administrations (province, territory or locality).

Centre versus the Regions under Yeltsin

There are 89 constituent political units of Russia, organised in a federal structure, and these have a variety of Russian names which can best be translated as: province [*oblast*], territory [*krai*], locality [*okrug*], republic, autonomous locality, autonomous province,³² and city of federal significance.³³ The different types represented a variety of statuses arising from Soviet modifications of tsarist era administrative divisions. Under the current Russian Constitution, the

³¹ Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, East Asia Analytical Unit, *Pacific Russia—Risks and Rewards*, Canberra, 1996, p.16.

³² Jewish Autonomous Province near the Chinese border in the Far East.

³³ Moscow and St Petersburg.

rights of each component are notionally equal. Therefore, for ease of reference, this pamphlet uses the terms 'region' or 'subject of the federation' in several places as a generic descriptor for these 89 units.

In its first decade as a sovereign country, Russia's federal structure became a major source of political friction, leverage and competition. The difficult relations were due in part to the way in which political and economic structures were set up in the Soviet period. But the more important cause of dispute after 1991 was the collapse of political authority and legitimacy of the central government in Moscow. This could only aggravate their dealings on the division of power between them, especially over tax and budgetary issues.

But there had been spectacular inconsistency in the dealings between the centre and the regions. More than 40 subjects of the Federation have signed separate treaties delimiting authority between themselves and the federal government in spite of the existence of constitutional provisions and laws which are supposed to provide for a uniform regime applying to all. There were at least 26 such treaties creating special terms for tax collection. In more than half of the 89 regions, constitutional laws were passed that conflicted with the national constitution.

A *modus vivendi* between the federal government and the federation subjects had been institutionalised to some limited extent through an innovation to the 1993 Constitution. In 1995, the method of selection of the 198 elected members of the upper house of the national parliament, the Federation Council, was changed to provide for automatic membership for the 89 governors (elected heads of regional administrations) and the 89 heads of regional parliaments [*duma*] chairmen. The direct elections, beginning in 1996, of the governors of provinces and territories gave the regional leaders considerable legitimacy in dealing with the Federal Government. In the 1996 presidential election, regional bosses played a key role in organizing Yeltsin's victory and thereby established a political constituency where it counts in the federal government for more independent action by them.

The final collapse of Yeltsin's authority in August 1998 meant that structural defects in centre-region relations were unlikely to be repaired as long as he remained in office. In any case, the federal government could not improve its legitimacy without dramatic and sustained improvements in its revenue base and without effective redistribution of this revenue to nationally significant purposes. The outcome of the political contest over the status of regions or over the form of relations between Moscow and the regions would remain central to the political future of Russia and its prosperity.

Putin's Political Revolution

By 1999, Russia remained a great power but it was severely hobbled. In governance it was a weak state in crisis. In social terms, it was a chaotic mix of hope and desperation, of order and lawlessness, of prosperity and poverty. There were many signs of consolidation of ordered, enlightened government, but this form of social organisation was still in open competition with despotic and repressive instincts in many political circles, including those closest to the so-called democrats in Yeltsin's immediate circle. Many people in Russia continued to suffer poverty and human rights abuses, even as others enriched themselves through clever capitalism or crime, or a combination of both. It remained to be seen whether the foundations for a liberal democratic, free market economy put in place by Yeltsin would be strong enough to withstand continuing pressure from political forces with a sharply contending vision of political order. The constitutional foundations of the Russian state had yet to be established by long observation of convention and principle. The written Constitution, which in any country can only be the first step to institutionalised stability, was first promulgated in 1993—a mere six years before Yeltsin decided to step down in late 1999.

The political consequences for his succession of the sustained decline in Russian living standards over the past decade and of the incapacity of the government to stabilise economic production and social life were inescapable. Russia was more likely to have a more authoritarian government before it would have a more liberal one.

This anticipation came to be fulfilled through the five years to date of Putin's presidency. Putin was first appointed (not elected) when Yelstin stepped down on 31 December 1999.³⁴ The remainder of this section addresses three areas of concern about the state of Russian democracy: press freedom, rule of law and multi-party democracy. While Putin may not be individually responsible for all of the negative changes and events, as President of Russia, he will have to be responsible for bringing about a reversal of the anti-democratic trend.

Press Freedom in Russia

Press freedom in Russia has been under siege from the first days of Putin's presidency.³⁵ The international press freedom watchdog, Reporters without Borders (RSF), ranked Russia 140th in a list of 167 in its latest press freedom index released on 26 October 2004.³⁶ Russia came in lower than countries like Kazakhstan, Sudan, Colombia, Yemen and Azerbaijan. RSF's report of 2004 on press freedom in Russia, which documents a litany of persecution and harassment by Russian officials against journalists and media outlets, said:

Russia saw a further deterioration in press freedom in 2003. The authorities exploited the public media during legislative elections and obstructed free coverage of the campaign to guarantee victory.³⁷

³⁴ As noted in the Introduction, this pamphlet is not principally about President Putin. As central as he is to the scene, he is not responsible for everything that happens in Russia. This pamphlet is about a bigger set of social, institutional, political and economic conditions that have created the circumstances that have either given rise to or been used to justify the threats to Russia's fragile democratic system.

³⁵ For a brief overview, see Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, Routledge, London, 2004, pp. 103-7.

³⁶ Michael McFaul, 'Indifferent to Democracy', *The Washington Post*, 3 March 2000, cited in Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, p. 89.

³⁷ Reporters without Borders, *Third Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index*, 26 October 2004, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=11715.

³⁸ Reporters without Borders, *The 2003 Global Press Freedom Tour*, 2004, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10229&Valider=OK.

The main lines of attack have included assassination of journalists (many cases of which remain unsolved by authorities), improper interference by government officials with the daily work of journalists (including kidnapping them and in at least one case poisoning them) the introduction of laws allowing heavy regulation by the government of media activities, exercise of this power in ways that are tantamount to a veto over all publications, concentration of ownership of TV stations in the hands of people sympathetic to Putin, abuse of the legal system to bring about that concentration of ownership, and government rhetoric identifying freedom of speech with irresponsible attacks on the government or subversion of the state itself. In September 2000, the Security Council of Russia drew up a 'Doctrine of Information Security' which provided a fore-taste of things to come. At the time it was widely attacked as an assault on press freedom for domestic and foreign media alike.³⁸

The names of murdered or persecuted Russian journalists (Paul Khlebnikov, Andrei Babitsky, Raf Shakirov and Anna Politkovskaya) are now almost as well-known outside Russia much as the names of famous dissidents in the Soviet period, like Andrei Sakharov or Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Assessments vary as to the motives and implications of the attack by the Putin administration on freedom of the media. According to Richard Sakwa, Putin has an 'apparent lack of understanding' of the values associated with a free media.³⁹ McFaul sees Putin as indifferent to such democratic values rather than opposed to them.⁴⁰ But a more robust interpretation seems inescapable: the Putin Administration has systematically attacked the free press in order to replace it with pro-Putin press.

Laura Belin argues that the aims of Putin's policy have been unambiguous: 'to enhance state power over the flow of information'

³⁸ See Johnson's Russia List, 15 September 2000, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/4514.html##7>.

³⁹ Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, p. 89.

⁴⁰ Michael McFaul, 'Indifferent to Democracy', *The Washington Post*, 3 March 2000, cited in Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, p. 89.

and 'to deter media outlets from challenging the President'.⁴¹ The persecuted Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya explains it by reference to Putin's past as a KGB official: 'When you are a subordinate, you keep your mouth shut. When you become the chief you talk in monologues'.⁴² She says that when anyone disagrees with Putin, he tells them to 'cut out the hysterics'. Belin says that Putin simply lacks the thick skin that politicians need to be able to tolerate aggressive media criticism. Another Russian commentator suggests that an independent media did not fit Putin's idea of 'presidential personified rule'⁴³ and that he sees critics as 'enemies of the state'.⁴⁴

As Andrew Jack notes in his recent book, the biggest danger is that as a result of this unrelenting intimidation of journalists, they will revert to self-censorship.⁴⁵ This concern has been raised by many other commentators. Once a government has cowed the media, the regular lack of critical investigation becomes one of the most insidious forces for the entrenchment and perpetuation of dictatorship.

Rule of Law

Like press freedom, the rule of law is one of the cornerstones of liberal democracy. There are several fundamental aspects to the idea, all of which flow from the one basic idea. First and foremost, the rule of law is a term that is used in contra-distinction to arbitrary and personalised rule by individual leaders who might use their administrative and coercive power according to their own interests and not according to the letter of the law. Second, this proposition implies that all citizens are treated equally before the law: rulers should not pick and choose which offenders to punish and which to overlook. Third, leaders and officials must be as subject to the rule of law as any other citizen. Fourth, in applying the law to offenders, a

⁴¹ Laura Belin, 'Politics and the Mass Media under Putin', in Cameron Ross (ed), *Russian Politics under Putin*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2004, p.133.

⁴² Anna Politkovskaya, *Putin's Russia*, Harvill Press, London, 2004, p.276.

⁴³ Lilia Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, Carnegie Endowment, Washington DC, 2003, p.94.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.106.

⁴⁵ Andrew Jack, *Inside Putin's Russia*, Granta Books, London, 2004, p. 171.

fair trial process is the only guarantee of protection from misuse of the coercive and administrative powers of officials. Fifth, a fair trial will be impossible without a court system governed by an independent judiciary. Sixth, a fair trial will be impossible if the accused does not have adequate means of defence. Seventh, the laws enforced by courts must not be made exclusively by those leaders or officials enforcing them. Eighth, there must be no major centres of coercive power (such as organised criminal gangs) that are allowed to compete with the operation of the civil legal system.

In Russia today, most if not all of these basic tenets of the concept of the rule of law are under threat or simply not observed. Many of the weaknesses in the system are legacies from the Soviet system, which was a complete repudiation of the basic concept of the rule of law. A US State Department report noted that in spite of some tendency to increase judicial independence through measures like pay increase and an expansion of the jury system, 'many judges still see their role not as impartial and independent arbiters, but as government officials protecting state interests'.⁴⁶ The economic and institutional chaos of the Yeltsin era contributed strongly to a massive increase in corruption within the legal system. The State Department recorded the following defects in the Russian legal system as recently as October 2004:

- ❑ manipulation of legal proceedings by political authorities
- ❑ large case backlogs
- ❑ lengthy pre-trial detention
- ❑ one of the highest prison populations in the world
- ❑ credible reports of torture of prisoners.

Yeltsin was the embodiment of personified power that was fundamentally opposite to the rule of law. As Shevtsova sees it, he 'failed to understand the role of the rule of law'.⁴⁷ She says that Yeltsin created a new quasi-autocracy on the remains of the Soviet autocracy, and he passed this system of government to Putin. The choice he made was to entrench this system in favour of personified

⁴⁶ Department of State, 'Background Note: Russia', October 2004, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3183.htm.

⁴⁷ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, p.66.

rule. He chose 'reliance on the *apparat*, administrative methods, subordination, loyalty, and instructions from above'.⁴⁸

It is important to note that under Putin's administration, there have been significant legal reforms intended to improve the rule of law and eliminate corruption in the legal system. The main question to be addressed is whether the 'improvements' of the legal system under the Putin administration will over time amount to anything if there is a persistent flouting of the basic principle of the rule of law at the highest levels of government.

Putin has certainly presided over important reforms. These have been summarised well by Sakwa. He notes in particular a new Criminal Procedure Code (2002) 'intended to defend the individual from the arbitrariness of the state' and a new Administrative Violations Code (2002).⁴⁹ Sakwa's assessment is that the Putin administration reforms 'were designed to improve guarantees for the human and civic rights of individuals' and to move toward an adversarial system 'where the rights of the defendant and the courts were more evenly balanced'. Sakwa also points to studies showing that the court system in Russia is not as corrupt as is often claimed.⁵⁰

The conclusion, though, for Sakwa is that in spite of progress in improved legislation, 'achievements in the field of enforcement have lagged behind'.⁵¹

Future of Multiparty Democracy

There have been important, apparently positive reforms to the party system under President Putin. Sakwa noted an emerging pattern of partisan alignment, new laws to reduce the large number of parties and to make them truly national in coverage, and complex arrangements for party registration that imposed useful legal and

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.258.

⁴⁹ Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice*, p.108.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p.109.

⁵¹ Ibid.

organisational tests.⁵² Yet, at the end of the day, as Sakwa points out, 'parties are still not adequately embedded in the country's social structure', 'do not effectively represent social interests', 'are not genuinely national in scope', 'do not legitimate power' and 'do not directly form governments'.⁵³

Of course, a country does not need political parties. The significance of the current state of play with Russia's multi-party system is therefore not so much in its formalistic structure as with how it is used and abused and in the electoral regimes that shape the share of legislative power that falls to elected bodies. The formation of the United Russia Party and its steady climb to popularity and almost unassailable dominance has been aided and abetted by the clear abuse of state power under Putin, including harassment of independent or opposition candidates and vote rigging. Allegations of widespread fraud by government officials in the December 2003 elections cannot provide much consolation in this regard as far as the future of a multi-party system is concerned.

Implications for Britain

Robin Cook notes in his preface to this pamphlet that 'Russia's protection of basic human rights would affect the sort of bilateral relationship it could expect with Britain'. The FCO noted in its December 1999 report to the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee that the UK's two principal interests in Russia are political stability and democracy on the one hand and a stable market economy on the other.⁵⁴ In supporting the EU's Common Strategy on Russia, the UK has endorsed a strategy designed to consolidate democracy, rule of law and public institutions, and to integrate Russia into a common European political and economic

⁵² Ibid. pp.114-7.

⁵³ Ibid. p.118.

⁵⁴ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, Minutes of Evidence, 'Memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office: the FCO's Role in Promoting British Interests in and Relations with Russia', 8 December 1999, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmfaff/101/9120802.htm>.

space.⁵⁵ The UK has a commitment to ensure that Russia honours its obligations as a member of the Council of Europe (CoE), to which Russia was admitted in 1996. Russia has eighteen seats in the Assembly of the CoE (the largest national delegation after France, Germany, Italy and the UK).⁵⁶

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, these policy goals have not been as prominent as fore-shadowed. Western policy towards Russia has increasingly centred on issues of security and energy. For its part, the UK government has made only muted criticisms of the emerging official abuses and systematic retrenchment of basic freedoms (especially media freedom). Press conferences involving Tony Blair and Vladimir Putin have barely touched on the issues of political change in Russia that have been addressed in this pamphlet.

Nevertheless, by early 2004, there was a growing appreciation within the UK government (and in the US) of the need to reverse the current tendencies toward concentration of power in the hands of the Putin Administration and toward the weakening of the rule of law. FCO Minister Bill Rammell said before a trip to Russia in 2004 that 'We have growing concerns about the Russian commitment to pluralism and a free media. Both are essential to a democracy. There has to be momentum towards democracy'.⁵⁷ US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, had earlier said that 'Russia seems not yet to have found the essential balance between the executive, legislature and judicial branches of government. Political power is not yet tethered to the law'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ European Commission, 'The EU's Relations with Russia', May 2004. See http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/russia/intro/index.htm accessed 2 November 2004. This reference is not the Common Strategy document itself. That was approved in 1999. It expired in June 2004 and a new one has not yet been issued.

⁵⁶ Mark Janis, 'Russia and the Leagility of Strasbourg Law', *European Journal of International Law*, 1997, Vol. 5, No. 1, <http://www.ejil.org/journal/Vol8/No1/art5.html>.

⁵⁷ Patrick Wintour, 'Britain to Voice Doubts on Putin', *The Guardian*, 5 April 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/russia/article/0,2763,1185942,00.html>.

⁵⁸ Colin Powell, 'Partnership, Under Construction', *Izvestia*, 26 January 2004, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/28495.htm>.

According to one Russian source, when President Bush, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Condoleeza Rice and Tony Blair met in London on 20 November 2003, they discussed the negative trends in Russia.⁵⁹ The report says that Powell raised the issue, claiming that Putin's authoritarianism posed a serious problem. The report says that Blair took issue with an assertion by Rice that it was important to continue establishing business contacts with Russia in spite of the negative trend. Blair is reported to have said that 'Putin's behaviour remains a problem' and that President Bush supported Blair's view.

A June 2004 report on the war against terrorism by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons provides a laundry list of all of the good strategic reasons why it may be important to have effective working relations with Russia regardless of the state of play of domestic politics.⁶⁰ These goals included:

- Russian support for post-war development in Iraq
- Russian support for peace and democratisation in Afghanistan
- Russian support in counter-narcotics strategy
- Engagement of the Russian government on reform of its armed forces so that they might more effectively contribute to the war on terrorism
- consolidating the work of the NATO-Russia Council
- working toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Chechnya
- cooperation in ending Iran's nuclear weapons development programme and
- Russian support for other counter-proliferation initiatives, including in chemical and biological weapons.

⁵⁹ Yegor Belous, 'Traces of dictatorship in modern Russia', *Pravda.Ru*, 6 April 2004, carried on Johnson's Russia List, #17-JRL 8153, <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/8153-17.cfm>.

⁶⁰ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism', 29 July 2004, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmfa/441/44112.htm>.

In the light of these important geopolitical interests of the UK and US, does it matter that Russia is in breach of a number of key commitments to observe European standards of democratic rule, particularly the protections offered by an effective and fair legal system and a multiparty, pluralist political system? Does the breaking of such commitments really affect the UK's vital interests? After all, it must be said that the turn to authoritarianism in Russia has not been accompanied by a return to the policies of military confrontation that characterised the Soviet era. Russian external policy is premised on broad strategic cooperation. So, on a day to day basis, the domestic developments described in this pamphlet may not be in any way a direct security threat to the UK or its alliance interests.

There are at least five important reference points in addressing this question:

- ❑ in the long run, illiberal means are inconsistent with liberal goals⁶¹
- ❑ totalitarian regimes normally become so by incremental means
- ❑ states moving from democratic to authoritarian or vice versa are more of a threat to peace than states that are stable democracies or stable dictatorships
- ❑ Putin's pro-western policies do not have strong support within Russia's security elites
- ❑ Russia has inadequate controls over some of its weapons of mass destruction or related materials.

It is the view of this author that these reference points, discussed in brief below, should shape further research and analysis in the UK about how to understand the Putin revolution as it has unfolded. It is important to place these considerations at a higher priority than more unprovable or formalistic arguments that concentrate on whether the Russian government has good intentions for restoring stability or whether the Russian system more or less conforms to a parliamentary democracy. The points below are not treated

⁶¹ Fareed Zakaria, 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy', *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1997, pp.22-3.

exhaustively here, but are mentioned rather for the purpose of highlighting important areas for further research.

Illiberal Means and Liberal Ends

In 1997, Fareed Zakaria argued that US interests demand support of liberal democracies, and rejection of illiberal ones. He argued that policy should consistently be informed by the view that democracy is only a form of electing governments, and says nothing about their character. The process of selecting governments through the ballot box is a public virtue, but 'not the only one'.⁶² The additional public virtues that a democracy must demonstrate to win US confidence, he asserted, include the rule of law, constitutionalism, pluralism, and respect for individual rights.

Zakaria makes a point that seems politically and morally defensible: 'illiberal means are in the long run incompatible with liberal ends'. Zakaria writes correctly that Yeltsin 'displayed a routine lack of concern for constitutional procedures and limits', and that his actions 'created a Russian super-presidency' that opened the way for abuse by his successors. US policy toward Russia had until 2004 rejected Zakaria's philosophical and moral logic on this specific point about ends and means. The US and the UK had operated on a different premise – the belief that Yeltsin was a 'liberal democrat at heart', as Zakaria concedes, and that Putin might be one too.

Thus US and UK policy toward domestic change in Russia appears to have taken a longer view – that there is a time element that has to be worked through, and that Yeltsin and Putin as quasi-liberals in a land of anti-liberals should be accorded a clear preference and strong support even though they fall short of the standards the US and UK might normally demand.

⁶² Zakaria, 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy', p.25, citing Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave*.

Totalitarian Regimes Are Built Incrementally

Few totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century became so overnight. The Bolshevik supremacy over their allies in the anti-Tsarist revolution, begun in 1917, was not secured until the mid-1920s. The full brunt of the Nazi Party's genocide against Jews developed through a series of escalatory measures during the 1930s, with key leaders of the Nazi Party uncertain at key stages in the 1930s just how far they could or should go in manifesting their hatred for Jews. The Chinese Communist Party, successful in taking power in 1949, did not turn decisively on its internal dissent until the second half of the 1950s.

The reasons for this are simple. First, in most cases where a new Party gains power through the ballot box in some way or even through military conquest, it has needed to build alliances with people and organisations outside the party. It is only once in power that those in command are able to use the instruments of authority to begin eliminating rivals. Second, there is the well-known maxim: power corrupts. A regime that consistently moves in the direction of restricting more and more alternate sources of authority and meets little resistance in doing so is more likely to continue in that direction than not.

Unstable Transitions and the Danger of War

One of the best investigations of the democratic peace theory found a new explanation not in the character of the state but in the fact it had stabilised.⁶³ The authors of this study noted that 'incipient or partial democratisation can be an occasion for the rise of belligerent nationalism and war'.⁶⁴ They also noted that virtually every great power has gone to war 'during the initial phase of its entry into the era of mass politics'.⁶⁵ The authors offer two important explanations. On the one hand, mass constituencies are usually not war prone, but are taken to war by elites who 'exploit their power in the

⁶³ Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, 'Democratization and the Danger of War', *International Security*, vol.20, no.1, Summer 1995, pp.5-38.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

imperfect institutions of partial democracies to create *faits accomplis*, control political agendas, and shape the content of information media'. On the other hand, the 'after-shock of failed democratisation' might be a powerful catalyst for closing the loop between war-like leaders and the wider public, thus taking them to war.⁶⁶

It is not likely that Russia will embark any time soon on this path. The more important consideration for the medium term will be that Russia will probably be a much harder partner to deal with as long as its domestic political order remains as unstable as it is.

Divergent Values of Putin and His Security Elites

Writing in 2003, Lilia Shevtsova concluded correctly that the 'Kremlin's choice in favour of the West is not solidified', is 'not supported by the national consensus' and 'has not become Russia's ideology'.⁶⁷ She points out that too many of Russia's elite have been unable to surrender the mentality of control and empire that characterised the Soviet era and that Putin does not even preside over a bureaucracy committed to his platforms. Another side of this coin is that the pro-Western tilt of Russia allows the authoritarians at home to continue without much resistance from other major powers who are keen to exploit the relationship with Russia primarily for its geopolitical potential.⁶⁸

Weak Controls over WMD and Related Materials

Russia is a 'weak authoritarian state with nuclear weapons'.⁶⁹ The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee reported in 2004 a very grim state of affairs in Russia in terms of its stockpiles of WMD. It reported about 19,500 nuclear warheads deployed or in store, a vast array of chemical weapons and related facilities, and biological

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p.7.

⁶⁷ Shevtsova, *Putin's Russia*, p. 266.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.264.

⁶⁹ Grigory Yavlinsky coined this turn of phrase.

warfare facilities of an unknown scale.⁷⁰ The Committee reported that 'individuals and institutions' in Russia 'profit greatly from the trade in WMD materials and know-how'. The Committee noted that vast sums have been spent on anti-proliferation initiatives but, in the case of the EU programmes at least, the contribution does not take sufficient account of the 'scale and threat of the task'.

A recent study published by the Foreign Policy Centre called for a shift in approach toward Russia on issues of counter-proliferation.⁷¹ This study assessed that the Russian government was too ineffectual and too corrupt to be trusted with the anti-proliferation regime that had been worked out between it and the US. According to that study, Russia is one of the most likely sources for the provision of contraband nuclear material to terrorists for use against Western targets.⁷² Russia is home to around 90 per cent of all fissile material outside of the US.

Recommendations

Western governments, especially the UK, can revitalise the question of Russian democratic governance as one of the central issues of European politics today. In this process, the injunction of Robin Cook in the preface to this pamphlet must be observed. Work by foreign governments to promote the reversal of the negative trends 'must be undertaken in a spirit of friendship and constructive support. It is important to avoid glib judgments that ignore the particular political, social and economic conditions in Russia'.

There are some good reasons why certain measures (such as the move away from election of governors to their appointment) have been undertaken by the Putin Administration. But this sort of response to Russian problems (quick resort to a reconcentration of

⁷⁰ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, 'Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism', 29 July 2004, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmfaaff/441/44112.htm>.

⁷¹ Amitai Etzioni, 'Pre-empting Nuclear Terrorism in a New World Order', Foreign Policy Centre, October 2004, p.13.

⁷² Ibid. p.12.

power and a lack of trust in democratic processes) carries strong penalties for Russia as well. This process creates a trap for Putin from which he will probably not be able to escape. There will always be good reasons for running more and more affairs from the Kremlin. The role of the international community is to make a robust and consistent case that there may be as many, if not more, good reasons for devolving power and mobilising the community at large to respect the political process that devolution involves.

The UK will need to apply whatever leverage it possesses (including through multilateral economic co-operation agreements) to vigorously promote the protection of the hard-won rights and freedoms in Russia. The UK should focus on enhancing its capacities in five principal areas of policy:

- ❑ public scrutiny of the Russian situation in the light of its commitments in European institutions
- ❑ use of high level channels and quiet diplomacy
- ❑ use of leverage available from multilateral lending agencies
- ❑ use of Western media and proxy organisations, such as NGOs and community groups, in order to open up debate about UK and European interests in Russia's political developments
- ❑ increased direct and indirect support to champions of liberal pluralism in Russia.

There needs to be a quantum leap, arguably a doubling, in effort in these areas.

More specifically, in key European institutions (the EU, NATO, the Council of Europe, and OSCE), the UK must open up in a much more visible way questions about the future of Russian pluralism and liberal democracy. This work can only be effective if the quiet diplomacy that this involves is complemented by new and regular public domain reporting by the UK and its European partners. Such reporting is an important tool of mobilisation of allies in Europe, as in Russia itself. It is only with detailed and accurate analysis of these issues that the debates, both private and public, will gather the necessary momentum. New inquiries by the Foreign Affairs

Committees of the UK parliament and the European parliament on the turn to authoritarianism in Russia appear to be essential. But the most powerful tool may be a new EU strategy document endorsed at heads of government level (European Council).

A principal target of this work must be a call to end the impunity of Administration officials who are engaged in the most egregious cases of political intimidation and abuse of power. President Putin must be held to account for the consistent failure of his Administration to observe and respect the fundamental rights of its citizens. To demonstrate its bona fides, the Putin Administration needs to secure sound convictions of those responsible for the murders of journalists.

Another target in the UK's mobilisation of European partners should be to agree joint programmes and priorities for more rapid reform of the legal system in Russia in ways that guarantee citizens' rights and help promote the development of a robust civil society that can be mobilised as a counter to corrupt officials or abuse of the system. A leading element of a more robust civil society is of course a free media and a functioning multi-party system.

A third but over-riding target for the UK in working with its European partners should be to secure early reversals of some of the leading negative trends, such as intimidation of journalists and concentration of media ownership in the hands of the government or its allies. European partners of Russia should insist that the move by Putin to appoint the 89 governors and to abolish elections for that post be accompanied by a 'sunset provision' (expiry date) linked to certain circumstances.

The UK should review as a matter of urgency its available funds under the Global Opportunities Fund and even the Global Conflict Prevention Pool to increase funding on democratisation, the rule of law and political party development in Russia. This spending should be significantly increased, by reallocations from lower priority issues where necessary, and should be coordinated with increased spending by relevant EU development funds.

The UK, EU, and key allies, especially the US and Japan, hold considerable leverage over Russia in the key international organisations, such as the IMF and the World Bank. In these organisations, the stepped-up engagement with issues of Russian domestic order cannot be a question of applying detailed conditions that Russia must meet, but rather one of opening up a more robust dialogue with senior figures in the Russian Administration about the negative trends in Russian political affairs, particularly those that the government itself can help to reverse. This dialogue needs a new intensity. Russia should be left in no doubt that it must live up to its commitments, both internationally and to its own people, to protect and promote a liberal democratic system that guarantees basic civil liberties, a more robust civil society, and a clear separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government.

Also available from the Foreign Policy Centre:

PRE-EMPTING NUCLEAR TERRORISM IN A NEW GLOBAL ORDER

Amitai Etzioni
September 2004
£9.95, plus £1 p+p

Leading communitarian author, Amitai Etzioni, argues for a shift in international counter-terrorism resources towards more focus on preventing attacks with nuclear weapons. The best way to do this, he argues, is to limit greatly the damage that terrorists will cause by curbing their access to nuclear arms and related materials.

ENERGY EMPIRE: OIL, GAS AND RUSSIA'S REVIVAL

Fiona Hill
September 2004
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On the back of windfall revenues from oil and gas exports, Fiona Hill argues that Russia has transformed itself from a defunct military superpower into a new energy superpower. Instead of the Red Army, the penetrating forces of Moscow's power in Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are now its exports of natural gas, electricity, cultural products and consumer goods.

BLAIR'S DOPPELGÄNGER: ZAPATERO AND THE NEW SPANISH LEFT

David Mathieson
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Mark Gill, Simon Atkinson and Roger Mortimore
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Greg Austin and Ben Koppelman
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Joshua Cooper Ramo
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The former Foreign Editor of Time magazine, Joshua Ramo, argues that there is a new 'Beijing Consensus' emerging with distinct attitudes to politics, development and the global balance of power. It is driven, the author argues, by a ruthless willingness to innovate, a strong belief in sovereignty and multilateralism, and a desire to

accumulate the tools of 'asymmetric power projection'. Though it is often misunderstood as a nascent superpower, China has no intention of entering an arms race. Instead, it is intent on projecting enough 'asymmetric power' to limit US political and military action in its region. Through fostering good international relations, it is safeguarding the peaceful environment needed to secure its prosperity, and deterring the attempts of some on the fringes of US politics to turn it into a pariah. Ramo argues that China offers hope to developing countries after the collapse of the Washington consensus. It provides a more equitable paradigm of development that countries from Malaysia to Korea are following. Based on more than a hundred off the record discussions, *The Beijing Consensus* captures the excitement of a country where change, newness and innovation are rebounding around journal articles, dinner conversations and policy-debates with mantra-like regularity.

MORAL BRITANNIA?

Evaluating the Ethical Dimension in Labour's Foreign Policy

Nicholas J Wheeler and Tim Dunne

Published on 26 April 2004

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Moral Britannia? examines how far reality has matched the famous promise made by Robin Cook to formulate 'a foreign policy with an ethical dimension' in the first weeks of the new government in 1997. The phrase came back to haunt Labour on issues as varied as arms sales to support for Bush in Iraq – and, according to authors Tim Dunne and Nicholas Wheeler, led to one of the great foreign policy debates since the 1930s.

It debunks some of the myths surrounding the issue, arguing that an 'ethical foreign policy' can be pragmatic, does not necessarily involve the sacrifice of national interests, and is not always as self-evident as critics suggest. Dunne and Wheeler's audit of Labour's record is broadly positive though it concludes that British involvement in the invasion of Iraq was not justifiable. Finally, *Moral Britannia?* sets out ten lessons to rescue the ethical foreign policy and re-establish relations with the rest of the world based on internationalist values and multilateralist institutions.

EUROPEAN POLICIES FOR MIDDLE EAST REFORM:

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By Richard Youngs

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