

EAST OR WEST?



RUSSIA'S IDENTITY CRISIS IN FOREIGN POLICY
ANDREI PIONTKOVSKY

The Foreign Policy Centre 

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a geopolitical earthquake that redrew the map of Europe and Central Asia. In his state-of-the-nation address, in April 2005, Russia's President Vladimir Putin went so far as to describe it as the 'biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century'. His declaration caused a stir among the world's political scientists, sociologists, economists and even philosophers. Yet the full import of his words was lost on much of his foreign audience. 'For the Russian people', Putin continued, the collapse of the Soviet Union 'became a real drama'.

This paper starts from the viewpoint that the drama was not merely geopolitical but also psychological, and that its aftermath led to a kind of schizophrenia at the highest levels of post-Soviet society. The paper diagnoses symptoms of this 'psychodrama' in Russia's foreign policy today.

For the past 15 years Russia's foreign policy has been engaged in a quest for a new identity. The paper draws on a variety of specialist studies, as well as on the speeches of President Vladimir Putin, to describe Russia's identity crisis in terms of the bitter ideological wars between so-called 'liberal Westernisers', 'pragmatic nationalists' and 'fundamentalist nationalists' that have influenced the country's foreign policy in recent years.

The paper argues that Russia's key but vulnerable strategic position in the heartland of Eurasia aggravates its post-imperial crisis of identity and threatens not only its 'vertical power' in the political system and economic spheres but also the very integrity of the Russian Federation itself.

The main topics discussed in the paper and, it is suggested, the main challenges now facing policymakers in the Kremlin can be divided into three categories: Russia's internal instability, the shadow of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, and the growing might of China looming over Russia's Far East and Siberia.

The broad outlines of Russia's identity crisis are well understood. Indeed the paper claims that its psychological symptoms may even predate the Soviet era since the arguments of today's nationalists and liberals merely echo the nineteenth-century debates of Slavophiles and Westernisers. In other words, Russia is permanently at a crossroads in its history and having to set a course between East and West. The decades-long standoff of the Cold War merely tranquillised the patient.

Yet the paper proposes a different analysis of the post-Soviet malaise. Some Western observers may claim to identify a nostalgia among Putin's *siloviki* for the ideological purity – and straightforwardness – of the Cold War era. But Russia's top politicians and generals are fully aware that the West no longer poses a military threat. Yet many of them refuse to accept, for example, the eastward expansion of NATO. Only psychology can help explain this paradox.

The paper argues that, in the first year or so of Putin's presidency, Russia's foreign policy assumed a clearly anti-American tone. The chief objective was publicly to counter the United States on all fronts, not least by abrogating the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement on ending Russian military sales to Iran, by ostentatiously visiting Cuba and by floating the idea of an anti-American pact with China. Yet in confronting the West certain things have become clearer even for the most fanatical Eurasianists and the most fervent anti-Westerners. As the rising superpower of the 21st century, China has no intrinsic need for any strategic partnership with Russia, least of all one with an anti-American basis. Therefore, in formulating policy, the Chinese leadership will be guided by anything but the post-Soviet complexes of Moscow's politicians.

The paper will argue that, unlike the ideological menace of the Cold War, with all its stabilising predictability, Russia's next civilisational clash will be rooted in religion and culture. It will argue that Russia should urgently relinquish its time-honoured suspicion and fear of the United States, in order to deal with the spectre of Islamic

radicalism not only in Central Asia but within the borders of the Russian Federation itself, namely in Chechnya.

The key policy finding is that:

- only by facing westwards can Russia achieve its foreign policy goals and secure a European identity for the twenty-first century.

This paper contends that Putin and his *siloviki* accuse the West, and the United States in particular, of exporting a version of democracy that will deprive Russia of its sovereignty. Such propaganda threatens to drive the traditional anti-Americanism of Russia's political elite to the level of hysteria. But the negative outcome will not just be psychological. It will have a long-term effect on Russian policy and lead to the country's isolation and marginalisation.

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Introduction

The fall of the Soviet Union a decade and a half ago sparked an identity crisis in Russia. Its effects continue to influence foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin today. This pamphlet will examine the post-Soviet legacy in terms of Russian geography and politics but it will also take into account psychological factors in the nation's quest for a new identity. That quest is discernible in the conflicting viewpoints of so-called 'liberal Westernisers', 'pragmatic nationalists' and 'fundamentalist nationalists' whose bitter disputes and rhetorical outbursts have become a staple of Russian political life. Its outcome will have a decisive impact on the kind of foreign policy, pro-Western or Eurasian, conducted by Putin's successor in the Kremlin. This pamphlet will argue that only by facing westwards can Russia achieve its foreign policy goals and secure a European identity for the twenty-first century.

Russia holds a key but vulnerable strategic position in the heartland of Eurasia. Firstly, an arc of instability (a zone of present and inevitably future unrest in the coming decades) runs along its southern border from the larger Middle East towards northeast Asia. Secondly, its geographical position aggravates the post-imperial crisis of identity. Everything in Russia is under scrutiny now. Everything is open to question: the political system, the economic model, and even the ethnic composition of Russia as a whole. Therefore we can put Russia's security problems into three categories:

- Russia's internal instability
- Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism
- The growing might of China looming over Russia's Far East and Siberia

Russian politicians and experts are fully aware that the West no longer poses a military threat. Yet many of them refuse to accept the good news. Only psychology can help explain this paradox.

It is not just a case of paranoia. For decades Soviet diplomats and the military establishment were trained to think of themselves and their profession, of which they were extremely proud, only within the context of global confrontation with the West, and above all, with the United States.

Adopting a celebrated maxim of the French philosopher Rene Descartes – *cogito ergo sum* – the unspoken logic of Soviet diplomats and military strategists, whether conscious or unconscious, was: 'I am America's rival, therefore I exist.' Or to be more precise: 'I am America's *equal* rival, therefore I exist.' For many in the Russian elite, losing the West as a threat feels like a loss of personal status. So for Russia's political class their country's search for its place in the new geopolitical framework represents a psychological problem. It is very difficult for them to concede not only that the United States does not pose a threat to Russia but, moreover, that a long-term alliance with the West offers the best and maybe the only solution to Russia's real security problems.

Russian Identity: is it Eurasian or Western?

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 ruptured Russian conceptions of identity, stimulating and splintering powerful debate on national self-perception. Russian identity had, after all, emerged from the remainder of Soviet territory left behind after the non-Russian republics had gained their independence. In the 1990's it arose entangled in the geographical and psychological inheritance of empire, a question barely settled by 2000 and the start of Vladimir Putin's presidency of the Russian Federation. The beginning of a new millennium has prompted a lot of talk, in Moscow and elsewhere, of Russia being at a crossroads in history. In fact, such talk is just another symptom of Russia's troubled quest for a new idea even if the quest itself is anything but new. Oddly, the idea of a 'Russian idea' (*russskaya idea*) predates the Soviet era. Indeed the arguments of today's nationalists and liberals echo the nineteenth-century debates of Slavophiles and Westernisers. In that sense,

Russia is permanently at a crossroads in its history, or standing in exasperation at a fork in the road but failing to resolve a geographical, historical, and metaphysical dilemma: is Russia part of Europe or not?

This juvenile complex of attraction and repulsion is typical of the Russian political mindset and in the past decade has resurfaced in the pages of dozens of publications by the Russian foreign policy community. These dwell on the problems of Russia-NATO relations, on broader relations between Russia and the West and are expressed in phrases such as: 'We are part of Europe, yet Europe is shoving us out of Europe'; 'We would like to have a strategic partnership with the West, but we are being rejected'; 'They do not believe in our desire for peace and friendship, and regard our good will as weakness.' Similar passages conjured up in various tones of incoherent prose call to mind the primary ideas of a classic Russian poem written more than eighty years ago:

*Come hither, to us! Come away
From the horrors of war into our warm embrace.
Should you not, we have nothing to lose
And treachery is open to us, as well...
Whilst groping through the barren lands and brush
Of dearest Europe, we shall
Retreat. We shall turn on you
Our Asian mug!*

(Alexander Bloc, 'Scythians', 1918)

There have been more than enough practical recommendations for 'turning our Asian mug towards Europe'. For example, Russia's need for a strategic partnership with China, equipping the armed forces with tactical nuclear weapons, and supplying 'anti-imperialist' regimes with nuclear weapons technology and the means for its delivery.

This excessively emotional reaction of the Russian political elite to the prospect of NATO enlargement and boisterously unanimous but senseless 'no' coming from Moscow could not be explained alone by the intensity of real or imagined threats to Russia's security.

The eastward expansion of NATO, or rather the Eastern or Central European states' flight to the West, has disturbed the very roots of Russia's political consciousness. It has revived a dispute that has never actually disappeared from the depths of its culture. Is Russia a part of Europe? In many ways it is not. Not because anyone is forcing Russia out of Europe, but because the question has not been resolved by Russians themselves due to specific aspects of history, geography, national psychology, and so on.

'We Russians,' the novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote in 1876, 'have two motherlands: our *Rus*, and Europe.' To Dostoyevsky, the double nature of Russian identity made it unique. But the controversy between 'Russia' and 'Europe' created the opposing type of the *zapadnik*, or Westerniser, whose dispute with his Slavophile adversary preoccupied educated Russians for much of the nineteenth century and took shape under the impetus of Pyotr Chadayev's *Letters on the Philosophy of History*, which, as Alexander Herzen famously commented, 'rang out like a pistol shot in a dark night' when first published in 1836.

Yet the counterparts in Central Europe to Russian philosophers such as Chadayev, Vladimir Solovyov and Ivan Ilyin never wasted much time pondering the origins and outlook of their motherlands. It was unnecessary for them to ask if they belonged to a European nation or not. The answer was obvious. It is no wonder, then, that these countries were very much inclined to confirm their geopolitical choice and reap benefits from their membership in the prestigious European structures.

Such a flight would not have been a crucial event in Russian relations with the West had not the Russian political elite, stirred by its deserted lover complex, started its 'heroic' struggle against NATO enlargement. Like any other neurotic, it camouflaged its irrational complexes with pseudo-national nonsense about the 'short time NATO airplanes carrying nuclear warheads need in order to reach their destination if they take off from Polish airfields, or even worse, Latvian ones.'

Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, becoming the first former Warsaw Pact countries to become members of the organization. They were followed, in 2004, by Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. Two years after Poland joined NATO, the Polish president visited Moscow. His host at the Kremlin noted with satisfaction that Russian-Polish relations, traditionally prone to ups and downs, had begun to improve in the previous two years. Indeed, it is not surprising that having finally confirmed its European identity, Poland has, at long last, freed itself from its historic Russian complex. In a new twist, bilateral relations between Russia and Poland have once again deteriorated in the wake of Ukraine's Orange Revolution and the Russia-EU gas crisis – but this is another story.

In the meantime Russia's vacillation over whether it belongs in Europe continues unabatedly. Questions pertaining to internal and foreign policies alike are inseparable. Regardless of whether it is the destiny of democratic institutions in the country that is in question, or Russia's relations with the outside world, there is one fundamental ingredient: the values of Russian society. By 'turning our Asia mug' to the West, the authorities are inevitably doing likewise vis-à-vis its own people.

Mapping Russia's foreign policy after 9/11

The feud between 'Westerners' and 'Eurasianists', now sharpened by the painful complex regarding the 'loss' of the Cold War, carries on apace within the Russian elite. With the new president at the helm, the pendulum has swung again to the side of Eurasianism. Putin need not take credit for this. The rise to power of a person with such a biography and mentality objectively reflected the predominant disposition within the Russian 'political elite'.

Foreign policy in the first year of Putin's presidency assumed a clearly anti-American tone. The chief objective was to counter the United States on all fronts. Some examples include Putin's decision to abrogate the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement on ending Russian

military sales to Iran, his demonstrative visit to Cuba and his efforts to build anti-American coalitions with China, not to mention the Soviet-style secrecy and falsehood that surrounded the sinking of the 'Kursk' submarine in 2000, and even the suggestion that it may have collided with a US vessel on a surveillance mission.

But by confronting the West certain things have become clearer even for the most fanatical Eurasianists and the most fervent anti-Westerners. First, for several millennia China has been a self-sufficient state, moving with feline-grace and unburdened by any psychological complexes. Contrary to what the Russian elite assert, it has no need for any strategic partnership with Russia, least of all one with an anti-American basis. For China – the rising superpower of the 21st century, relations with the United States as its prime economic partner and political rival are far more important than relations with Russia. Therefore, in formulating policy, the Chinese leadership will be guided by anything but the complexes of Russian politicians. Furthermore, for Russia, relations with the United States, the G7 countries, and the West are far more important than its relations with China. On the whole, all of Russia's historical Eurasianism is an expression of its anger with the West, and for the Russian elite, nothing more than a psychological outlet. All of these considerations have been brilliantly articulated in Alexander Bloc's aforementioned poem. Passionate expressions of love for Europe are interspersed at the minutest causes with threats: 'And if not, we having nothing to lose, treachery is open to us as well.'

Where do China, India, our 'brother Serbs,' or the North Korean dictatorship stand in all of this? They constitute nothing more than the fleeting whims of the Russian elite suffering from the manic depression needed to justify its emotionally-charged relations with the 'eternally despised' and 'eternally beloved' West. Incidentally, the Chinese are perfectly aware of this and their reaction to Russia's sporadic games is sceptically mixed with an undeniable dose of condescension and utter disdain. It is, of course, possible to briefly entertain false associations for tactical purposes, but this has become a tiresome business.

The events of 9/11 have sharply accelerated the maturation of Russia's foreign policy. At the same time, the practical tasks involved in creating the anti-terrorist coalition the United States has led since 9/11 have forced Russia to waive many of its assumptions made at the beginning of President Bush's first term. It became evident that even the mighty United States is unable to ensure its security by itself. Cooperation with its allies is essential, with bilateral agreements and compromises established in each case. Russia's significance as a political ally for the United States has turned out to be substantially greater than it seemed only a few months ago, particularly in the context of military operations in Central Asia, where Russia wields as much influence, connections, and potential. In any case, the United States has proved to be highly interested in a tactically-defined and cooperative military-political alliance with Russia.

Putin provided the United States with notable practical assistance for operations in Afghanistan. It would be surprising however if he had acted differently. This could be a first time in Russian history where someone else was doing Russia's dirty work; it has usually been the other way around. Russia had long been interested in ridding its southern courtyard of Islamic radicals and bombing terrorist camps but abandoned this plan after realizing its incapability of carrying it out effectively. Why should it prevent the United States from doing this job?

Nevertheless, regardless of Putin's obvious pragmatic choice, he has met with subdued reproof from a considerable segment of the Russian political elite. The trauma of defeat suffered in the Cold War and the loss of superpower status have grown into a deep, insuperable psychological complex in the collective sub-consciousness of Russia's political class. Still, the immense responsibility traditionally heaped on the shoulders of the Russian head of state, apparently has given him time to dwell in this phantom world of complexes and fantasies so dear to the heart of the Russian political establishment.

Today, back in the real world, a serious military threat is emerging from the South while tomorrow an even greater threat might appear

from the Far East. An army of poorly equipped conscripts is all that remains of the Soviet superpower, whilst most of its combat-ready units are trapped in a single rebellious province. Yet all of its military doctrine is directed towards a non-existent confrontation with the West. While not denying, in principle, the choice Moscow has made in favour of the anti-terrorist coalition, a segment of the elite persistently asks what 'price' the West - meaning, the United States - is going to pay for Russia's support. Various 'menus', more or less along the same lines (missile defence, NATO expansion, debt restructuring, etc.) have been presented, and seminars and symposiums have been organized on the topic: 'To what extent should America get support.'

Such a formulation of questions revealed how outdated and out of touch of current reality Russian elite strategic perceptions were. Instead, the focus should be on Russia's long-term strategic interests and the level of U.S. involvement needed to address these security concerns.

Problems of Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism

The Cold War imposed a menacing but stabilising predictability on international relations. Its end ushered in a profusion of fault-line rhetoric including the espousal of a civilisational clash rooted in religion and culture, the new basis, in the absence of ideology, of internal state structure and external behaviour. In reality this did not herald a new civilisational schism but it did underline a new predicament for Russia. Moscow's search for a new national identity, on the one hand, and in relinquishing its time-honoured suspicion and fear of the United States, on the other, has been complicated by the spectre of Islamic radicalism not only in Central Asia but within the borders of the Russian Federation itself, namely in Chechnya.

Here the outlook is confused. As far as Islamic terrorism is concerned, the threat to Russia was reduced by the allied victory in Afghanistan which allowed Russia to wipe out terrorist lairs in its 'near abroad'. But the long term solution to the terrorism issue

depends as well on the current war in Iraq and, more generally, on the success of modernisation in the larger Middle East.

Nothing could have foretold the global tectonic shifts in the early 1990s. The era of the 'end of history and of enlightened leadership by a single superpower' seemed to arrive. Gradually, however, apparitions of the bipolar structure that did not agree with the end of history began to crawl out from the debris. For nearly half a century, first the KGB and later the CIA carefully nourished, taught, and armed (guiding one against the other) Arab and non-Arab militants who marched forward under different radical Islamic banners. Left without a mission and without any hosts, the ambitious jihadists soon found themselves a new and much more ambitious calling.

They turned out to be in the right place at the right time. The Muslim world, especially Middle Eastern countries, experienced a serious crisis of civilization, a demographic explosion, mass unemployment among the youth and the absolute corruption and ineffectiveness of the ruling regimes. All the ingredients for a social explosion and an Islamic revolution were there. The refusal of the elite, who were swimming in petrodollars, to give up even a portion of their super profits to change the archaic social structure and to lead their countries along the thorny path to modernization left them only with the option to channel the Islamic radicals' aggressive energy against a 'foreign enemy' - the West and, first and foremost, the United States.

In general, anti-Americanism around the world is by no means the social rebellion of the destitute. It is, in a way, a metaphysical rebellion of those who are affluent and privileged but deeply suffering from a sense of their diminished secondary status. In Russia, too, anti-Western and anti-American complexes and passions rage in the rarefied upper layers of the elite, in which it is acceptable to have wives go to American clinics to give birth and to send children to study in American universities.

In one way or another, thanks to the achievements of Western technology, the elite's unanimous hatred toward the West has been translated by all the electronic mass media of the Arab street. As a

result, the jihadists were strong by virtue of 'popular opinion' and by an excess of recruits from the most diverse layers of society - from millionaires to beggars. By virtue of their effective horizontal network structure, independent cells arose in the most diverse corners of the world and inflicted painful blows on American interests. Before 9/11, however, they were not taken seriously. After 9/11 it became truly possible to speak of a new world war declared by radical Islamists against the West and not by some faceless 'international terrorism'.

What, though, do we mean by the term 'international terrorism'? It is, in many ways, a meaningless term because terrorism is not some sort of political movement but rather a method of combat that has, to some degree, been used in all military conflict. The Tamil Tigers, for example, have made extensive use of suicide terrorists in their fight against Sri Lanka's central government. It is clear, however, that none of those who speak about 'international terrorism' are referring to the Tamil Tigers or the Sikhs. What is really being referred to is al-Qaeda and its network of cells using terror (that is, intentional mass murder of civilians) as its main means of waging war.

The al-Qaeda network structure uses an ideology to unite groups arising independently in different regions by exploiting local problems and conflicts. New cells appear as old cells get destroyed and the movement is experiencing no shortage of young enthusiasts or financial resources. The entire world watched as crowds on Arab streets celebrated September 11 2001. The challenge radical Islam presents to the West remains serious and very dangerous, especially given the all-or-nothing challenge of its political objectives and ideological orientation. Conventional terrorism was and remains an 'applied' craft. Those who have used it have achieved specifically outlined objectives including territorial independence, the liberation of some criminals, ransom, and so forth. Islamic terrorism, on the other hand, is a metaphysical terrorism that strives for the absolute, namely the destruction of the godless West and the establishment of God's Kingdom on Earth in the form of a world Islamic caliphate. The objectives are absurd and unrealistic. Nevertheless, they attract thousands and perhaps millions of fanatics who are prepared to do almost anything for the cause.

Spinning Russia's 'war on terror'

And exactly where does Russia fit into all of this? The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 proved a rallying cause for Sunni Arab Islamists who waged an anti-Soviet jihad with the help of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's Interservices Intelligence and the United States. After its Afghan venture, Russia (and its Soviet hypostasis) would seem to have done everything in order to direct the Islamic revolutionaries' growing passionate energy against itself. Surprisingly, however, it was bypassed. It is true that Ayatollah Khomeini, pursuing his 'Neither East nor West, only Islam' policy, denounced the USSR as the 'Little Satan' but either Soviet dissolution removed this association from the Islamic radical agenda or else by some animal instinct radical Islamists felt a social proximity to the Russian elite and its repugnance towards the well-heeled and prosperous West. In any case, the increasing Islamist attacks throughout the 1990s were directed mainly against the West – partially against India and China, but in no case against Russia. The first Chechen War did not change anything. It was a classic conflict between the 'centre' and the separatist ambitions of the 'periphery'. It was not loaded with any religious or ideological content and was broadly justified under the rubric 'restoration of the constitutional order'.

The second war in Chechnya began as a key campaign instrument of the parliamentary elections in 1999 and the presidential elections in 2000. Vladimir Putin was elected largely on a Chechen war ticket. The spirit-lifting 'wipe 'em out in the shithouse', to quote Putin's famous use of the vernacular, united a nation 'rising from its knees' and transformed a little-known bureaucrat not only into the country's president but also into a national hero. Of course, the elections took place without a hitch but the war continued for a very long time thereafter. Chechnya was no longer yielding and will never yield any political and psychological dividends – they were all completely recouped during the election campaign. After becoming deeply aware of its shameful incompetence, the political 'elite' needed new and stronger stimulants to raise its spirits.

And a new wide-scale myth was born in our newspapers. It appeared that in Chechnya we were not fighting against former tractor drivers, secretaries of All-Union Lenin Communist Youth League *raykoms* or (in the best case) Soviet colonels. We were fighting against an international Islamic fundamentalist organization that sprawled from the Philippines to Kosovo. Yes gentlemen, we are Scythians. We are Asians with slanting and greedy eyes. And like docile lackeys, for centuries we have been holding a shield between enemy races – Mongols and Europeans. We report it to enlightened Europe, even with a certain amount of hurt in our voice: 'Russian soldiers are today on the frontlines in the fight against Islamic extremism. Unfortunately, there are few who notice. Today we are witnesses to the creation of a certain extremist international organization along the so-called arc of instability that begins in the Philippines and ends in Kosovo. This is very dangerous for Europe as well, especially because it has the large Muslim population. This is truly an international terrorist organisation. And in this sense, Russia is on the frontline of the fight against international terrorism. And by the highest standards, Europe should be grateful to us and get down on its knees because we are fighting [terrorism], unfortunately all alone.'¹

Well it was of course psychologically comforting to perceive the Chechen war not as a war with a rebellious colony that has already gone on for at least two centuries but rather as a crusade against world Islamic terrorism. While this might have constituted a more successful PR route for presenting the war to Western public opinion in 1999, six years have passed since then. We have repeated that we are fighting international terrorism in the Caucasus so often that it has now become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In fact, in the past few years, the behaviour and world perception of the Chechen fighters and the significant portion of the population that sympathizes with them (especially young people) have changed rapidly. The field commanders who had pursued purely separatist objectives are being replaced by ideologues who consider themselves part of a broader World Islamic Jihad.

¹ From a speech by Vladimir Putin in London in October 2000.

And the problem is not that they are receiving financial and manpower support from the Near East, amounts of which are fairly insignificant. More importantly and more dangerously is the evolution of the jihadists' mentality and the objectives they have set. It is no accident that these groups are becoming increasingly international in their composition, especially with members of different northern Caucasus ethnic groups. Chechnya's status and its fate as a nation do not matter to the Islamic 'internationalists,' including the Chechen ones. They consider it a springboard to a worldwide Islamic revolution and for jihad against Russia.

The socio-political situation in the northern Caucasus today fits the same formula of Islamic revolution: poverty, the total corruption of secular authorities, the demographic explosion, and mass unemployment among youth. With Russia's stubborn refusal to engage in any talks with the separatists in Chechnya who do not share the jihad ideology the fuse of this revolution is being lit. Step by step this is methodically leading to an Islamic jihad front throughout the northern Caucasus directed exclusively against Russia. For more than a year, federal authorities ignored all the complaints of Ingush residents regarding the mass kidnappings of people by local directors of the Federal Security Service (FSB) until the events in Nazran erupted. But even afterwards, no conclusions were made.

The Islamic jihad is a horizontal network united by a common ideology that is infectious and convincing for millions. Its local elites are fairly autonomous and can spread like cancer cells, infecting new sections. And Russia's policy is creating a support-base for such a revolution in the northern Caucasus, pushing increasing numbers of recruits into its camp.

Russia and the Third World War

But let us return to the main front of World War III, Iraq. No matter how the military operation in Iraq develops in the future, the United States has already experienced a serious political failure. It has made a number of mistakes, mainly after the end of the purely

military stage of the operation. Recall that in later 2003, only 20 percent of Iraq's population (according to public opinion polls) considered the coalition troops as occupants, whereas 80 percent of the population now holds such opinions. The question of whether the military operation against Saddam Hussein was justified from the outset is not purely academic against the background of the real problems facing the coalition in Iraq.

In the US presidential election of 2004, Senator John Kerry lost to the incumbent not because he criticised George W. Bush's disastrous adventurism in the Middle East, but because he was completely helpless in his answer to the question of what should be done in Iraq now. He repeatedly promised to involve European allies and the UN. Yet, Bush would have gladly involved them himself. The problem is that France and Germany will not send a single soldier to Iraq, not even to protect the UN mission in Baghdad.

Europe, especially France, is longing for the maximum humiliation of the United States in Iraq and for them to run away in a Vietnam-style scenario. A very broad anti-American front – from left-wing intellectuals to right-wing nationalists – has formed in 'Old Europe'. The former have traditionally hated the United States as a bulwark of imperialism, defiling bright Communist or socialist ideals with their victory in the Cold War. The latter during the decades of that same war grew tired of being followers in the Atlantic community and accumulated many grapes of wrath against their big American brother. As far as France is concerned, the United States saved it in three world wars including the Cold one. That has never been forgiven.

I will not discuss the mood on the Muslim street. Inspired by electronic mass media – from BBC to Al-Jazeera – all 'progressive' mankind is thirsting for some kind of humiliation and injury of America. The Russian political elite looks like a tragicomically absurd contingent in this world ideological jihad. The effort wasted to prove to the world its commitment to fighting international terrorism has already been mentioned. But with what triumphantly gloating pleasure the Russian state media presents any military failures and

casualties of the United States, which is after all officially our partner in the counterterrorist coalition!

What will be the consequences of America's departure from Iraq, about which the Russians and Europeans are dreaming so passionately about? To what dramatic turn in the course of World War III will it take? It seemed that directly after Bush's second election victory that scenario might be ruled out. But no longer is this the case. The United States is encountering serious problems in Iraq and will continue to do so for a long time. In essence, they are facing the same strategic task that Russia is facing in the northern Caucasus – winning the hearts and minds of the local population. The Islamic radicals and their sponsors understand perfectly that Iraq is a decisive engagement and they are throwing all their reserves there, trying to induce chaos and universal discontent in the country.

The United States must endure losses and overcome the unavoidable misfortunes of war. It must withstand not simply the hatred of most developing countries but also loathing from their closest traditional allies who have unexpectedly discovered they have an enormous reserve of accumulated purulent malice towards their senior partner. In the event that the coalition leaves Iraq, the departure of troops from Afghanistan will be a matter of a few months, if not a few weeks. It is difficult to even imagine the triumphant enthusiasm that will grip millions of people in the Muslim world, including even that thin layer of the secular elite which understands perfectly that it could be swept away in the jihadist revolution.

'We crushed one superpower in Afghanistan, and now we are crushing the second in Iraq.' That guileless theme is bringing tens of thousands of young Bin Ladens to Islamic radical camps. The enormous region spanning from the Near East to Central Asia will become a reservoir of Islamic extremism. In Afghanistan, things are reverting back to the situation of 2001. Radicals are beginning to move back to Central Asia. Their advocates are waging an uprising in the Ferghana Valley and other hot spots where the situation is already more explosive than in the north Caucasus.

In general, all this passionate energy of triumphant Islamism will be inevitably directed against Russia via Central Asia and the Caucasus, not because of Russia's hostility to them but simply in view of their natural inclination to expand their influence throughout all regions fertile for Islamic revolution. This movement will be thwarted in Kazakhstan, a country whose huge energy resources China will never allow Islamists to grab. China will of course establish a military-political protectorate over that sphere. After, the geopolitical fate of Siberia and the Far East will become more obvious.

The 'grand chessboard': Russia's next move?

And what about the United States after it leaves Iraq? After realizing it has somewhat overestimated its capabilities, the USA will return to a rather traditional concept of 'Fortress America'. And it may not be so bad for them. After 2001, not a single act of terror occurred there. In the United States, the bipolar model of coexistence with the USSR, which during the final decades of the Cold War was more of a paradigm of global stability than of confrontation, will be recalled with increasingly nostalgia. And accordingly, the same bipolar model Zbigniew Brzezinski proposed ten years ago in his famous book 'The Grand Chessboard', which seemed exotic and marginal at the time, will enjoy increasing popularity. It is a model of the United States and China condominium which will determine the geopolitical structure of the 21st century.

While the United States was at the peak of its power, it was incomprehensible why it had to hoard such fantastic strategic presents into its sphere of influence, including Japan, Taiwan, Central Asia, and Siberia. After the fiasco in Iraq, Brzezinski's concept may seem to be an escape hatch – especially when China demonstrates itself to be the sole force capable of limiting Islamist expansion. The Sino-American alliance may also prove more stable and enduring than the American-Soviet one because it will be full of serious economic content.

Fortunately, not everybody in Washington shares these concepts. The direct or indirect absorption of Russia's East by China does not correspond to U.S. interests, since it would only intensify the challenge Beijing poses to Washington as an emerging global superpower. Thomas Graham, Senior White House Advisor on Russia to President Bush, shares this view on Russia's future. Graham writes: 'One thing is clear. Constructing a durable balance will be more complicated if Russia's presence in Asia wanes further. In this sense, the United States, as well as most Asian powers, have a long-term strategic interest in building and maintaining a healthy Russian presence in East Asia... given U.S. interests in the region, it would make sense for Russia and the United States, along with other interested countries, to examine how they can rebuild the economy of the Russian Far East so as to bolster Russian sovereignty there.'²

The coincidence of U.S.-Russian strategic interests in the Far East, as noted above by Graham is a consistent, historical trend rather than a recent geopolitical phenomenon. The American diplomacy of U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who served as arbiter between the parties in 1905, helped Sergei Witte (then the Russian Foreign Minister) forge an honourable peace that was acceptable to Russia. Roosevelt acted after the United States became alarmed at the unbalanced strength of Japan in the Pacific region, following its military victories in the 1904-1905 war with Russia. For this act of enlightened self-interest, Roosevelt won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The United States later conducted secret negotiations with the Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War in order to prevent Japanese domination of the Far East and Siberia. The mission of the American troops who landed in Vladivostok was subordinated to the very different priority of preventing Japanese incursion.

The common interests of Russia and the United States in the Far East are also linked to the prospects for an energy partnership between the two countries. The United States is trying to lesson its

dependence on imports of oil from OPEC countries and primarily Saudi Arabia, which faces increasing threats to its stability and has been the main financial sponsor of international Islamic terrorism. Russia could become a better option for the United States in this important area for strategic consideration. A joint Russian-American endeavour would require substantial investments in the infrastructure of the Russian fuel and energy complexes in Siberia and the Far East. The construction of a pipeline, from Angarsk to Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean, would help revive the economies of the Pacific Rim. The future of Siberia, northeastern Asia, and the future of world energy markets are fundamental spheres in which the interests of Russia and the United States objectively coincide, the potential basis for a long-term pragmatic confluence. Many experts of both countries understand this geopolitical reality. But political resolve to articulate these common interests at official levels seems lacking. One gets the impression that the leadership of each side wants to stop short of definition and commitment so as to preserve other alternatives.

There lurks in Washington an influential, economically-driven lobby of large corporations and their affiliated politicians who favour a kind of condominium of superpowers – the United States and a future 'Greater China' – as the basis for the geopolitical structure of the 21st century. The security of Russia as an integral part of the Euro-Atlantic community, therefore, depends on the decisive historical victory of Russia's 'Westerners' over its 'Eurasians', who continue to predominate within its foreign policy establishment. Yet, the 'Westerners', as I have already elucidated, face a difficult problem of overcoming deeply embedded anti-Western complexes and prejudices. Such traditions have been going on inside Russia and its socio-political culture for several centuries

Today, however, these political debates have been aggravated by the election campaign initiated by Putin's administration in anticipation of 2008. Scared by the chain of 'colour' revolutions in Russia's near abroad and determined to prolong its grip on power beyond the time-span defined by the constitution, Putin and his *siloviki* unleashed an aggressive propaganda campaign based on the concept of so-called 'sovereign democracy'. They accuse the

² 'Russia's Decline and Uncertain Future', Carnegie Endowment, 2004.

West and the United States in particular of imposing on Russia its version of democracy and so depriving her of its sovereignty. This campaign pushes the traditional anti-Americanism of the Russian political elite to hysterical dimensions. It is already negatively affecting Russian foreign policy, leading to Russia's isolation and marginalization.

Putin is currently performing a U-turn in his foreign policy that perfectly suits China, whose historical program of swallowing Russia will be greatly facilitated by Russia's petty and counterproductive geopolitical confrontation with the West. This trajectory towards a 'strategic partnership' between the United States and China leads not only to the marginalization of Russia but also to the loss of control over the Far East and Siberia, at first *de facto* and then *de jure*. Shanghai games are of no interest to China. Much more important for Beijing is to achieve its intermediate strategic goal, to sever Russia's political ties with the West and thereby facilitate the task of its absorption by drawing it into a Chinese sphere of influence.

The Holy Alliance of Emperors Pu and Hu is a union of a rabbit and a boa constrictor. It will inevitably and very quickly lead to a complete Hu-ization of our little Pu. While desperately trying to pick up the piece of its 'near abroad,' Russia will soon find itself turned into China's 'near abroad.'

Never before has a diagnosis of collective manic depression in the Russian political class been so methodically demonstrated by its own behaviour as in the passing year. In the beginning of 2005, after the Beslan tragedy and the Ukrainian elections debacle, the diagnosis was that of acute depression. The Kremlin cronies began to moan and cry simultaneously in their articles and interviews: 'Enemies, the fifth column, the front line crosses every street, every home, every outhouse, we will return fire, unite around us, otherwise Russia will definitely fall...' Panic-stricken, they began to form attack squads of 'Nashi' (Ours) for eliminating any signs of orange revolution in Russia.

In accordance with medical textbooks on clinical illnesses, at some point in August of last year the depressive phase ended and the patient entered a maniacal phase. It seemed to him it was rising from his knees and the very same cronies began to joyfully proclaim: 'America is retreating. We will be victorious!'

In countless analytical articles, otherwise respectable Russian pundits tried to give a rational explanation for this instant turnaround in the mood and feelings of the Russian political elite. They noted, justly and not without a degree of satisfaction, that recently our European, Ukrainian and, especially irritating to us, American neighbours have suffered the loss of a few cows.

These kinds of incidents always brought us some relief but why on earth could these circumstances, not dependent on the will and deeds of the Russian patient, be taken to attest to his suddenly attained greatness? And why does his paranoid consciousness continue to perceive the world and his role in it exclusively in terms of glorious confrontation with his eternal American rival?

No, I cannot concur with the diagnosis of my respected colleagues. It's too premature to talk about Russia's recovery. Indeed what we are witnessing bears all the hallmarks of classic syndrome in psychiatry. It is cyclical illness, a kind of addiction – and the easy availability of the 'fix', in this case the unimaginable profits of a corrupt oil and gas autocracy, is the major obstacle on the path to recovery. The very latest symptoms are especially alarming. A country where quack doctors such as Putin and Abramovich can operate shamelessly and with impunity to carve \$13 billion, as in the case of the Sibneft-Gazprom deal, has no future. It cannot have strategic partners. It will not be respected either in the West or in the East. Or, at any rate, not until doctors Putin and Abramovich have been struck off the medical register. In other words, only by facing its domestic challenges and orientating its civilisational identity Westwards can Russia rise above its afflictions, achieve its foreign policy goals and secure a European identity for the twenty-first century.

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Translated by Maria Blake

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The widespread presence in government posts of Putin's former KGB and FSB colleagues has also fostered this revival of Soviet-style propaganda. Their actions and decrees are evidence of a belief that it remains essential for Russian society to be dependent on regular dosages of manipulated information for Russia, and the reign of President Putin, to endure.

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Yet, many of these questions are crucial for understanding the present and future of the Russian electoral landscape, and hence the future of the country's democratic development. The Russian electorate is now far less predictable in its political preferences than in the first decade of modern Russian political history. Under such conditions, the prospects for the formation and development of an effective multi-party system appear quite bleak.

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As the title 'Kremlin Echo' suggests, there are various interpretations of the effects of Vladimir Putin's policy on the rule of law in Russia, not only from abroad, but within the Kremlin walls as well. Andrei Illarionov, an Economic Advisor to President Putin, gave several scathing criticisms of Putin's reforms before he stepped down as Putin's personal representative to the 'Group of Eight' on 4 January 2005. His interview on 30 December 2004 on Ekho Moskvyy Radio has been translated by the Federal News Service and has been

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In the preface, Andrew Jack explores President Putin's contest with Yukos as he tries to reassert his power over a broken system. Konstantin Sonin, in his piece entitled 'Putin's Rule of Law is Mere Rhetoric' analyses Putin's recent political reforms, and its repercussions on the Russian economy and Constitution.

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About the Future of Russia Project

This pamphlet is the fifth in the Foreign Policy Centre's 'Future of Russia' project which is built around seminars, lectures, publications, media contributions and larger conferences on the future of liberal and pluralist democracy in Russia. The project takes recent Russian developments and Russian perspectives as its departure point, but grounds 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 are to expose to wider media scrutiny the reversal of hard won freedoms in Russia and to address the foreign policy dilemma faced by European 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 is 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 features prominent figures from Russian progressive politics, as well as leading specialists and policy advisers from around the world. The project concentrates 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.

In late June 2005, the Foreign Policy Centre (FPC) hosted a series of briefings in London on political change in Russia as it affects three key policy areas: law and the abuse of power, tax and the economy, and politics and pluralism. The aim was to use the visit to Britain of President Putin for the G-8 summit in early July as a way of focusing more attention among key decision-makers in Britain on negative political trends in Russia. This pamphlet brings leading Russian and British scholars together in outlining a set of policy options for the Putin administration to consolidate progressive democratic and economic reforms.