

Chapter 18

RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES: IN SEARCH OF A NEW PARADIGM

Russo-American relations can hardly be understood without taking into account the Russian ruling class's divided attitude toward the United States. It sees Americans as the only nation in the world whose spirit and outlook remotely resemble those of Russians and as the only nation that deserves its attention. The Russian elite is impressed by America's messianism, will to power, and its longing for world preponderance. It perhaps unconsciously imitates the American way of life and the way the United States behaves in the international arena, especially its tough politics and readiness to demonstrate military muscle. It simultaneously loathes Americans for the same reason, purely because Russia cannot afford to behave like America, let alone compete with American might. It lacks the resources to have a global mission of its own and, more importantly, it lacks the ideas needed for such a mission. The Russian political class constantly compares Russia with the United States, and it hates making this comparison and the fact that the comparison is rarely in its favor. Unable to control its emotions, the Russian elite not infrequently lashes out at America, even if that harms its own interests. Russian analyst Andrei Piontkovsky noted that the Russian elite's view of the United States is the "revolt of privileged and well-off people suffering deeply from

an inferiority complex, and this complex is not only a Russian, but a global phenomenon."¹

These ambivalent feelings also underlie the Russian political class's mood swings in its dealings with the United States, which, if they do not shock Americans—unfamiliar as they are with the idea of the subconscious playing such a role in state policy—at least leave them puzzled. The fact that after the fall of the USSR, the United States was and remains the only hegemon still standing evokes even more negative feelings because of the Russian elite's inability to cope with its nostalgia for past Soviet might. In addition, Russia is not used to living in a unipolar world (though it would apparently feel disoriented in a multipolar world). The Russian elite reacts badly to American boastings about American might, virtue, and American claims hailing the United States as a benevolent hegemon or "indispensable nation." The elite has evidently forgotten that during the Soviet period it did not hesitate to define the role of the USSR in analogous terms, annoying some and infuriating others. The point is, however, that the Russian political establishment constantly demonstrates its indignation at American arrogance not because it finds such behavior sickening, as it sickens Europeans, who cannot abide the "benign hegemon" syndrome. The Russian elite is irritated because it cannot afford to behave that way itself. Any advance in American interests, even should such interests coincide with the interests of Russia, dismays the Russian political class. "We don't need a sheriff," Russian politicians say. What they mean is that Russia itself would like to be the sheriff. Even while criticizing Americans, Kremlin functionaries mimic them step by step: the United States has a war on terrorism, so Russia has its own war on terrorism; the United States threatens preventive strikes against countries it dislikes, Moscow declares it may do the same; Washington finds an "axis of evil," and the Kremlin comes up with its own "enemy axis." If anyone criticizes Moscow for its aggressive policies toward other states, the Kremlin propagandists promptly reply, "If the Americans can do that, why can we

not do the same?" Russia's politicians just adore maximalism and see consensus and compromise as signs of weakness, almost as American neoconservatives do. Ironically, the Kremlin's shift toward its own conservatism at the end of Putin's term has been justified and legitimized as a response to conservative U.S. unilateralism. The morbid focus of attention on America and the attempt to see the world entirely as reflected through Russia's relations with the United States show up both the limitless pretensions of the Russian elite and its diffidence, its neuroses, and its attempt to disguise them as self-confidence. The one thing that wounds the elite more than anything is that Washington no longer pays much attention to its old sparring partner. That is what the Kremlin really cannot forgive America for. The United States' ignoring of Russia not only humiliates the Russian elite but also reduces opportunities to use its relations with the United States for domestic purposes to strengthen the statist thrust of the regime. Recently Kremlin spin doctors have succeeded in using Russia's humiliation at being ignored by America for mobilization purposes to beef up anti-American feelings.

Russian views of U.S.–Russian relations continue to vary, but the direction in which the perceptions of a major part of the Russian political establishment have evolved has become unmistakable: a significant number of those who formerly believed that robust U.S.–Russian relations would help to promote Russia's domestic transformation and integration into Euro–Atlantic structures have started to express their skepticism about the feasibility of this scenario. Even Russian liberal commentators cannot suppress their frustration, questioning not only the possibility of the U.S.–Russian partnership but also the positive role of these ties in Russia's modernization. The majority of Russian politicians and observers today view the United States with open suspicion, accusing it of using Russia for its own pragmatic ends.

On the American side, those perceptions and moods could hardly provoke anything other than frustration. From the very

moment of the Soviet Union's collapse, the United States has been wrestling with the dilemma of "how to balance traditional realpolitik concerns against a liberal-international outlook. Should Washington focus primarily on Russia's foreign and security policy or should it become more actively involved in shaping Russia's postcommunist political and economic transformation?"² President George H. W. Bush chose realpolitik in trying to contain the consequences of the nuclear superpower collapse. As noted earlier, the Clinton administration initiated a very different strategy, one of supporting Russia's transformation and integration into the Western community. Clinton devoted great energy and a huge amount of time to U.S. relations with Russia, pursuing the ambitious goal of making Yeltsin's Russia a Western partner and ally, trying to help it dismantle its nuclear weapons and promote a free-market economy and a civil society in Russia.

Clinton's security policy was successful. It helped to fill the vacuum of force left by the collapse of the USSR and diminished the threat of proliferation. The Clinton–Yeltsin partnership stopped the race for strategic nuclear supremacy and, as Zbigniew Brzezinski put it, "codified America's de facto promise to Russia that the U.S. would not exploit its advantage in wealth and technical know-how to obtain decisive strategic superiority."³ However, in the eyes of Russians this pledge did not survive even Clinton's presidency.

There was also the question of economic reform. Returning back to those days, Strobe Talbott, former U.S. deputy secretary of state, admitted on May 24, 2007, "I think, we can only be self-critical; that is, those of us in the Clinton administration looking back to some extent ... could have used a lot more major up-front support from the outside world. We and Russian reformers should have paid a lot more attention to the structural side of what was necessary in economic reform and ensuring that there would be real rule of law."⁴ In terms of building a liberal democracy, Clinton and his team had to watch Yeltsin's neo-patrimonial backlash with anguish.

Regrettably, the Russian prediction and judgment of Clinton's tenure is generally based not on its mission to keep "the political miracle of our era" going, but on the basis of the U.S. strategy in the Kosovo conflict, NATO enlargement, and its support of the unpopular Yeltsin regime. These factors became instrumental in deepening Russia's distrust of Americans. NATO enlargement continues to be the most serious irritant to all Russian political forces. Even liberals perceive NATO enlargement as a reflection of the U.S. conclusion that Russia cannot be transformed, Russia's neighbors should be taken under the umbrella of NATO, and a new *cordon sanitaire* is needed between Russia and the West. In any case, the Clinton administration left the scene amid growing mutual disappointment between Washington and Moscow. Analyzing U.S.–Russian relations in 2001, Thomas Graham wrote: "Indeed, the relationship had reached its lowest point since the breakup of the Soviet Union, and perhaps even earlier."⁵ In several years it would become clear that the end of the Clinton era was not the lowest ebb in U.S.–Russian relations, when Moscow and Washington seemed to be on a collision course.

When Putin came to power, he was not in a hurry to build a rapport with Clinton. His intentions were clear. He waited for Clinton's successor to be elected. A new era in U.S.–Russian relations was approaching. Bill Clinton's formula of partnership with Russia in support of its transformation was rejected under George W. Bush, who expressed no interest in Russia or any intention of getting involved in Russian affairs. The new U.S. president embarked on a classic realist approach, trying to engage Russia in the U.S. security agenda and letting Russians solve their problems themselves. After reacting with optimism to Bush's *realpolitik*, which for the Kremlin meant that the United States would not preach democracy to Russia and would not meddle in its domestic affairs, Moscow was soon dismayed by Washington's downgrading of the relationship.

What motivated the Bush stance toward Russia? From the Russian perspective it seemed that the new U.S. president either

did not believe in Russia's reforms or thought that what mattered for America was first of all a stable Russia, acquiescing to the United States. Washington ceased to regard Russia as a foreign policy priority. It was no longer a rival or major influence in world affairs, and the Bush administration evidently did not anticipate any unpleasant surprises from Russia. Along with this loss of interest in Russia, the American establishment lost interest in conceptualizing the processes that were occurring in Russia and Eurasia.

The Putin and Bush relationship began with a scandal when, in the spring of 2001, the Americans exposed Robert Hanssen, who had been working for Moscow for fifteen years. Fifty Russian diplomats suspected of espionage were expelled from the United States. In retaliation, Russia expelled fifty American diplomats, and both sides called it a day. At the Ljubljana U.S.–Russia summit that followed shortly afterward, in June 2001, Bush and Putin unexpectedly found a common language. It was after that meeting that Bush uttered his famous line, "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy, and we had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul." Actually, as it soon became apparent, it was not a matter of Bush's ability to read men's souls, but a decision taken by the American administration to embrace a policy of engagement with Russia. Yet as James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul noted, if Clinton saw his policy of engagement with Moscow as a means of helping Russia to reform, Bush considered it a means of resolving American security issues.⁶ Washington wanted to ditch ABM arrangements without time-consuming discussions with the Russians, which Bush accomplished brilliantly by trading on his personal rapport with the Kremlin. To all appearances, Bush rarely raised the question of freedom and democracy in Russia in his discussions with Putin during this period (if he raised them at all). He had no wish to be distracted while resolving questions that were more important to him. Putin was pleased with his meetings with Bush, and we may deduce that they did not discuss any-

thing that could have upset the Russian leader. Bush's realism delighted Moscow, and Putin promptly made his relations with Bush Russia's foreign policy priority, apparently hoping the Americans would upgrade the relationship as well and begin to view Russia as a serious partner.

The chain of unexpected and dramatic events that followed shortly afterward caused the Kremlin to react in a quite extraordinary manner. Putin's response to the tragedy of 9/11 was unambiguous: he unhesitatingly offered help to America. By his telephone call to Bush immediately after the terrorist acts, Putin not only behaved like a pro-Western leader but seemed at the time to have changed the substance of Russia's relations with the United States. Today, motivations behind Putin's pro-American U-turn are more apparent and it can largely be explained by the fact that the terrorist attack on the United States appeared to confirm to Putin that he had been right in warning the world about the threat of international terrorism. It also confirmed his explanations regarding the war in Chechnya, for which the West had condemned him. "I warned you!" This was the message Putin was giving the world and America with his behavior and his rhetoric.

Indeed, the Russian president might have been more cautious in his policy toward the United States, particularly as his advisers were categorically against extending assistance to the United States and the political class continued to be hostile to its former rival. The Russian leader took what was for many Russians an unexpected stance. After 9/11 Putin spent six hours trying to persuade his team that Russia should help the Americans. Though he did not get any support from them, he decided to go ahead with his decision. Upon leaving that meeting, Vladimir Putin made a televised address in which he announced Russia's readiness "to make a contribution to the war on terrorism." Russia really did help America, providing intelligence information about Afghanistan, allowing the United States to use its air space and create bases in Central Asia, and making available Russia's contacts with the Northern Alliance, which

opposed the Taliban. Moscow also increased Russian assistance to the Northern Alliance, which fought largely with Russian weapons and, as many Russian observers suspected, with the help of Russian military instructors. In November 2001, Putin flew to a summit in Washington at precisely the moment that Kabul fell and the Taliban was defeated. The Russian leader radiated optimism as he declared, "If anyone thinks that Russia could again become an enemy of the United States, I do not think they understand what has happened in the world and what has happened in Russia." This appeared to be a historic breakthrough in the relations between the former rivals.

At that moment observers in both capitals began to ponder whether Russia and America might work better as a team than either one had with Europe, given that Russia's relationship with the EU was greatly strained. "Russia could assume a more important role as a global U.S. partner. What appears to be evolving are new transatlantic partnerships, unimaginable before the collapse of communism," this author wrote with Angela Stent in the winter of 2002.⁷ Equally optimistic was Robert Legvold, who pointed out in August 2002:

Since the events of September, [the] relationship between the U.S. and Russia has changed more fundamentally, above all because of the revolution in Russian foreign policy. Although incomplete ... the change runs deeper than is often recognized.... The Russian leadership had to make a crucial strategic choice. It was to throw Russia's lot in with the U.S., which also meant Putin was reconciling himself to what could only be called a junior partnership with the U.S. given the asymmetry of power between the two countries.

However, Legvold felt that there were caveats to the new U.S.-Russian realignment, warning, "Common interests there are. Common values remain to be demonstrated."⁸ The author and Angela Stent also hedged bets, warning that "the new U.S.-Russian relationship has not been consistently smooth

going,” and the transition to a productive partnership demanded that Russia embody Euro–Atlantic values and that the United States adopt a policy of long-term engagement with Russia based on the premise that “Russia should be a part of Western civilization.”⁹

Soon it became clear that the Bush–Putin axis in 2001–2002 was built on another premise, one that might be called “a Faustian pact.” The United States was silent about Russia’s democratic deficits, the war in Chechnya, and growing pressure on independent media. In return Putin acquiesced to American policy, particularly the U.S. presence in Central Asia, which had previously elicited loud Russian protests. For quite some time the United States treated Putin’s growing authoritarianism leniently. One had the impression that Washington ascribed it to either the need to push through difficult reforms or did not care much about Russia’s vector, thinking that Russia needed an “iron hand” to rule it. The main explanation was that Washington needed Russian assistance and partnership in its war on terrorism and nothing else could distract Bush from his major goal. In any case, the Kremlin’s further crackdown on political freedom and pluralism did not prevent a positive rapport between the two leaders, to the great frustration of Russian democrats.

Although the Russian political class continued to fume over the selfishness of the United States and its lack of respect for Russia, the Russian president long remained imperturbable, avoiding gestures that might irritate the Americans. Strobe Talbott, observing Putin’s behavior after the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the ABM treaty in 2002, expected him to demand compensation from Washington, as Yeltsin had always done in such situations. Instead, Putin reacted calmly to Bush’s wrecking of the entire network of agreements on which the policy of nuclear nonproliferation had been based. He remarked, “We consider the U.S. decision to be a mistake,” while emphasizing that it “presents no threat to the national security of the Russian Federation.”¹⁰ Putin wanted to maintain

a constructive relationship (as he understood it) with the United States. He understood the asymmetry of the might and potential of the two countries and had no wish to become embroiled in a fight with Washington. At the same time he could not be happy with Washington’s decision. That was the moment when the seeds of future Moscow resentment toward Washington were planted.

Putin was right in his assessment of Bush’s desire to eliminate binding agreements and dismantle the arms control structure. As further developments would show, this policy has undermined the nuclear nonproliferation process. Yet the optimistic vector in the U.S.–Russian relationship was preserved. In May 2002, the United States and Russia approved a Joint Declaration on New Strategic Relations that promised, “We are achieving a new strategic relationship. The era in which the United States and Russia saw each other as an enemy or strategic threat has ended. We are partners.” In the declaration both sides acknowledged the presence of shared interests in safeguarding stability in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. The declaration laid the foundation for a new stage in the partnership: joint efforts to ensure stability in the post-Soviet territories. That Moscow agreed to an American presence in its own backyard could have been interpreted as a sign of a watershed in the mood of the Russian leadership. Moreover, the declaration provided for cooperation in creating and developing a joint strategic missile defense system. This, however, was the pinnacle of Russo–American relations, after which the mood soon began to falter.

In Washington the change of direction did not immediately register, and Moscow’s refusal to support its military operation in Iraq came as an unpleasant surprise. The White House quickly overcame its disappointment and directed its wrath at Chirac and Schröder. This differentiated approach to the participants of the “coalition of the unwilling” was reflected in the axiom “Punish France, ignore Germany, and forgive Russia,” which was attributed to Condoleezza Rice. Soon, however, other signs began to indicate that the relationship was far from cloudless.

Looking back, we can imagine that when he entered the Kremlin Putin had several options to choose from with respect to Russia's relations with the United States. The first was to be militant in his public pronouncements but in reality to follow in America's wake as Yeltsin had, agreeing to the role of junior partner. The second option was to oppose American interests, particularly in the former Soviet space. The third was for Russia to distance itself from the United States in areas where Russia had insufficient resources to collaborate with the United States on equal terms, and to continue a dialogue in areas where Moscow could be a full partner. After September 11, 2001, President Putin hoped (as Yeltsin had before him), that an opportunity had arisen for a more ambitious model of relations with America: an equal partnership of Russia and the United States.

How did Putin envisage such a partnership? He never gave details, but his rhetoric and his actions suggest that the Kremlin may have surmised that the United States would not intervene in Russia's internal affairs and would accept that Moscow had a right to do as it pleased within the territory of the former USSR and to expand its role in world affairs. Possibly Putin hoped that the appearance of a common threat from terrorism might make that partnership a priority for both countries. He may have even dreamed about a Russo-American world condominium. It soon became evident, however, that any such hopes were without foundation.

The United States not only had its own understanding of the struggle against terrorism, but had no intention of making Russia its key partner or even an equal partner. It took Russia for granted, overlooked those issues that divided them, and put U.S. interests first, without paying attention to Moscow, in just the same way as it paid scant attention to its Atlantic allies. Washington pursued security interests, trying to avoid any involvement in Russian domestic problems. This political realism regarding the expectations of Washington policy makers did not save U.S.-Russian relations. The Russo-American partnership so much talked about in the early years of Putin's rule—

the joint struggle against international terrorism, the partnership in the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the dialogue over energy security—all this business of a "triad" ground to a halt. It became apparent that the partners had entirely different ideas about what the triad constituted and how it entailed the vital interests of each partner.

Chapter 19

WHAT WENT WRONG?

During Putin's second term, the Russian elite began returning to the idea of Russia's superpower role, which demanded an assertive and tough foreign policy. Even loyal Putinists started grumbling about his compromises, "softness," and constant retreats in dealing with the Americans. The Russian elite produced a long list of grudges against the United States: the war in Iraq, retention of the long-obsolete Jackson-Vanik amendment on freedom to emigrate, unilateral repudiation of the ABM treaty, the expansion of NATO, reluctance to strongly support Russia's application to join the World Trade Organization, failure to reciprocate when Russia withdrew its military bases in Vietnam and Cuba, attempts to expand its presence in post-Soviet territories, and an unwillingness to leave Central Asia at the end of the Afghan operation. Moscow felt that Washington should make corresponding concessions each time Russia retreated, even if the retreat resulted from weakness or was entirely in Russia's interests, demonstrating a return to a zero-sum mentality. Thus, when the United States routed the Taliban in Afghanistan, which Moscow had regarded as the main threat to its security in the south, it protected Russia's interests. The Kremlin nevertheless felt the Americans should make a reciprocal gesture and agree to dismantle the U.S. bases

in Central Asia. Usually, however, the Americans complained that when pressed about what they really wanted as reciprocity, the Russians remained vague. It was apparent that Moscow was unhappy about nearly everything. Yet most of all, it was unhappy about the things it knew could not be changed in its relationship with the United States. The Kremlin's constant litanies have become its masochistic way of reviving the old phobias, which have been reinforced by American maximalism and its ignoring Russia's grudges.

At some point, Vladimir Putin rejected his previously cautious stance and threw a wrench into the relationship, unleashing a tide of hostile rhetoric. Normally restrained, he began making openly critical remarks about Washington. In December 2004 he stunned an audience when he compared the United States to the colonialists of old: a "strict uncle in a pith helmet instructing others how to live their lives." Soon he declared U.S. concerns on the situation in Chechnya to be "aimed at rocking the Russian Federation." It was a sign that the Kremlin no longer felt constrained by the declaration of a partnership; it had decided to be open in its annoyance with Bush's policies. By 2006 the Russian leader ceased to edit himself when attacking the United States and compared it to "a comrade wolf that knows whom to eat"—"he eats and listens to no one." The reasons for the Kremlin's unhappiness with the United States were evident. Moscow did not get the benefits from the partnership it had expected. On the contrary, it started to suspect Washington of meddling in its domestic affairs and of supporting the "orange virus" in the former Soviet space. Ironically, these suspicions emerged at a time when the U.S. administration was doing everything it could to maintain a neutral stance—demonstrating how edgy and neurotic the Russian political class had become. That the Russian president and Russia's political class began openly and increasingly to encourage anti-American sentiment in society is sufficient testimony to a shift in the Kremlin's position. The ruling team ceased to see the United States as a reliable partner, viewing it instead as a threat. Putin

himself was evidently disillusioned with Washington and no longer trusted the United States or its leader and did not try to conceal his new feelings. The change of rhetoric meant that Moscow opted for a revisionist course in its relations with the United States. The shift toward anti-Western mobilizational tactics in domestic policy was reflected in Russia's relations with the United States.

President Bush continued to refrain from criticizing his friend Vladimir. Only once did the U.S. administration gently chide the Kremlin. In an article published in *Izvestia* on January 26, 2004, Colin Powell wrote:

Certain developments in Russian politics and foreign policy in recent months have given us pause. Russia's democratic system seems not yet to have found the essential balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. Political power is not yet fully tethered to law. Key aspects of civil society—free media and political party development, for example—have not yet sustained an independent presence.

The general impression was that Washington intentionally closed its eyes to violations of democracy in Russia. American policy makers either failed to understand the foreign-policy implications of the Kremlin's authoritarian shift, underestimated it, wanted to avoid making things worse by lecturing to Putin, or did not have means to influence the Kremlin, which seems to be the most plausible explanation. In the end they seemed to have been taken aback by the Kremlin's growing assertiveness on the international scene and the anti-American thrust of its rhetoric. Gradually, Washington started to view the developments in Russia with increasing alarm: the Yukos affair and Khodorkovsky's arrest in 2003 were seen as the Kremlin's striking a blow against the institution of private property. In addition there was growing state control over the media; the centralization of power; Moscow's meddling in Ukrainian

affairs; attempts to push the United States out of Central Asia; support of authoritarian regimes like that of Lukashenko; and finally the passing of a law on nongovernmental organizations in 2006. Yet already by that time, the United States did not have much leverage over Russian developments.

Soon events in the Middle East and failures in the Iraq war forced the Bush administration to shift toward a democracy-promotion ideology and to declare democracy as a means of guaranteeing American security. In this connection, Leon Aron wrote: "The post-9/11 activist U.S. foreign policy, which perceives the promotion of liberty and democracy as the key strategic means of ensuring America's security, cannot but be increasingly at odds with the Kremlin's post-imperial 'restoration.'"¹ Moreover, the democracy promotion agenda was incompatible with the realist course the United States was pursuing toward Russia. In practice, however, the U.S. shift to democracy promotion rhetoric did not much change its cautious approach to Russian domestic developments.²

Yet, starting in 2005, Washington could no longer conceal its growing irritation with Moscow's foreign policy and produced a list of its own complaints about Moscow. Not only was there the refusal to support the U.S. operation in Iraq, but also reluctance to endorse American plans for Iran. Moscow supported regimes like Iran, Libya, Syria, and Venezuela, which the United States considered hostile, and was selling them arms. There was dialogue between Moscow and Hamas, the sale of arms to China, sanctions against the newly independent states, and finally, the curtailing of democracy within Russia. Still, Washington continued to make efforts not to overplay idealism and democracy promotion with Russia, trying not to irritate Putin.

What were the reasons it proved more difficult than anticipated to make a reality of the strategic partnership Putin and Bush had proclaimed, and why did the relationship go so sour in the end? "Americans can't tolerate us because we became strong," would be the explanation of Russian pundits and politicians, and this was accepted by many Western observers. If

one follows this logic, the relationship between the United States and Germany, a country that became a powerful regional power, should deteriorate as well, yet the two states continue to be close allies. The key reason behind the decline in U.S.–Russian relations in 2006–2007 definitely lies beyond any “weak–strong” dichotomy and beyond the foreign-policy realm. Both states organize power and society quite differently and the existence of common geopolitical interests did not counterbalance the structural and normative incompatibilities between the Russian and U.S. systems, as many experts on both sides hoped. Then why do the relations between Washington and communist China continue to normalize and even appear friendly, a devil’s advocate would ask? The U.S.–Chinese constructive dialogue proves that political will, the existence of strategic goals that include understanding of the repercussions of every policy action, and a broad economic agenda might mitigate systemic incompatibilities, at least partially and temporarily. Russo–American relations have been lacking that cushion.

Henry Kissinger, deliberating on the estrangement between the United States and Russia, wrote, “The estrangement falls into two categories: on the American side, disenchantment with domestic trends in Russia, disappointment with Russia’s foot-dragging on the nuclear issue in Iran, and reservations about the abrupt way Russia has dealt with the newly independent former parts of the Russian empire. On the Russian side, there is a sense that America takes Russia for granted, demands consideration of its difficulties but is unwilling to respect those of Russia, starts crises without adequate consultation and intervenes unacceptably in the domestic affairs of Russia.” Explaining the difficulty in resolving mutual complaints, Kissinger points out that the United States identifies “normalcy and peace with the spread of its political values and institutions,” whereas Russia has been seeking it “through a security belt in contiguous territory.” He admits that “many Americans criticize Putin for reverting to an autocratic system.”³ In this way, the architect of realpolitik acknowledges the normative limitations of U.S.–Russian relations.

Precisely these limitations affected Bush’s foreign-policy realism in dealing with Russia. Admittedly, Bush’s realism has worked in Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. It does not work in relations with Russia for two interrelated reasons. First, Russia has returned to a system that, for its survival, requires an enemy, reviving the “historical experience” Henry Kissinger mentions; it needs to reproduce the militarist mentality and cannot function in a unipolar world that inevitably brings it on a collision course with the United States. Second, the United States, with its longing for hegemony, cannot be relaxed about the emergence of a state based on different normative values that seeks to recreate its area of global influence. This being the situation, mutual disenchantment has been inevitable.

Other factors have added to the central tension. Moscow became increasingly restive over the resource asymmetry between the two countries, deciding on energy resources to counterbalance the might of the United States. Perceptions also matter. The impression is that Bush and Putin meant two entirely different things by “partnership.” Bush apparently saw it as a way of realizing America’s security agenda and, seemingly, of containing Russian expansionism. Putin saw it as a way of raising Russia’s profile and as a guarantee of Russia’s global role. U.S. attempts to establish a presence in the territories of the former USSR were interpreted by Moscow as an unfriendly act. Washington saw Russia’s exploitation of its energy resources and economic expansion as violating the principles of global energy security and a demonstration of imperialism. Moscow saw America’s meek attempts to lecture Russia on democracy as constraining Russia’s sovereignty. Finally, the White House, with its “ignore-and-take-for-granted” Russia policy, underestimated the stakes in U.S.–Russian relations. As Andrew Kuchins wrote, “Russia’s importance for U.S. interests is underestimated in Washington, especially given our concerns about the proliferation of WMD, radical Islamic-inspired terrorism, and energy security. What other country can potentially promote or thwart our interests on all three of these first-order priorities to the

extent that Russia can?"⁴ That Washington disregarded Russia as a serious international actor has been a painful experience for the Russian political class. It wasted no time skillfully using the Iraq conundrum to reassert its regional and global presence and trying to undermine U.S. hegemony wherever possible. In so doing, it enjoyed the tacit approval of China and some European states. As the presidencies of Bush and Putin drew to a close, it was clear that, after a period of hope for a constructive partnership (albeit, understood differently) in 2001–2003, neither side continued to harbor illusions about the new reality of their mutual relations.

Some analysts, considering what has obstructed a strategic partnership between Russia and the United States, put an emphasis on other factors. They point to the lack of permanent bodies to guarantee that the political declarations and intentions of the respective governments would be implemented. During the 1990s the Gore–Chernomyrdin commission, by following the technical details of the U.S.–Russian cooperation, acted as a cushion to soften the political winds. When Russia stopped being a priority for the United States, however, such institutions became obsolete. Another reason behind the deterioration of the relationship in the minds of many Russian pundits is the U.S. withdrawal from the arms control dialogue. As developments in 2007 would show, there are undoubtedly issues on the arms control table that need to be resolved. Yet here we are dealing with a paradox: the Russian political elite misses the arms control dialogue with the U.S. because it had served as a confirmation of Russia's superpower status, which means in fact that the Russian political class continues to see the United States as a foe, while at the same wanting to be a key U.S. partner. This contradictory dual identity might puzzle any American counterpart.

Understandably, Washington grew tired of constantly masaging Russian pride, helping to cure Russian complexes, and pretending to deal with an equal. However, the understanding by the U.S. foreign-policy establishment of how dramatic the

process is of Russia's shift to a different paradigm within the lifetime of one political generation could have helped to mitigate, at least partially, mutual unhappiness about the relationship. It could hardly prevent the unhappiness and mutual resentment altogether. Finally, there are no common economic interests underpinning U.S.–Russian relations such as exist between Russia and Europe. The United States accounts for only 2.6 percent of Russia's exports, occupying eleventh place, and 4.6 percent of Russia's imports, which places it fifth. Exports to Russia are less than 1 percent of all American exports. According to Russian sources, trade volume between the United States and Russia reached \$15.3 billion in 2006. Around \$7.7 billion out of \$55 billion in foreign direct investment came from the United States. One has to admit, however, that active economic ties between Russia and the EU did not preclude a cooling of relations between them (although the economic factor continues to be operative in the U.S.–Chinese relationship).

Looking back over the past decade, one cannot but note that if Bill Clinton's policy of warmly embracing Russia ended in the mutual disenchantment of Washington and Moscow, then Bush's realpolitik is ending in even worse shape, with a relationship crisis that is not always acknowledged in either capital. At first, it seemed that the personal rapport between Putin and Bush would help to neutralize possible tensions between the two countries. Indeed this occurred on more than one occasion. A moment came, however, when the personal chemistry of which the two leaders were so proud could no longer stem the buildup of mistrust between the two capitals. It has made the situation worse, since there are no other mechanisms that could support the loose fabric of the relationship. Besides, neither leader appears to truly understand the nature of their relationship or the intentions of the other. Bush may have thought his friendly relations with Putin would keep the Russian president within a framework that Washington could understand. Putin believed his friendship with Bush would ensure that the United States would not encroach on territories that Russia considers

within its sphere of influence and that the United States would close its eyes to “distinctive features of Russian democracy.” In his view, he had made concessions to the Americans on many occasions. He was evidently expecting reciprocal gestures and was disappointed when nothing was forthcoming. “What have we received in return for our concessions to America? They could not even repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment,” one Kremlin official exclaimed. He was right. For Russians, the Jackson-Vanik amendment is a humiliating leftover of the past that reminds them that the Cold War is not over.

Political substance apart, one might wonder how Putin and Bush have retained friendly personal relations for so long (or were they pretending all along?). Not only had they different political agendas, they have completely different political personalities. Bush, with his stubborn consistency and ideological approach, is the antithesis of the chameleon-like Putin, with his ambivalence and flip-flopping. In the end, they have proved that relations based on personal rapport (for which both sides criticized the Clinton–Yeltsin partnership) cannot be sustained unless they are based on a more solid foundation.

The U.S. side, however, has tried, even in 2006, to argue that “the trend has been positive,” downplaying the growing rift, whereas the Russian side has been openly critical of the relationship. “I do still think that we have a relationship with Russia that is beneficial to both sides and that is workable on many issues,” said Condoleezza Rice on May 1, 2006, still trying to stop the further nosedive of the U.S.–Russian relationship. Inevitably, the question arises of setting standards for judging the success or failure of the relationship. Can it be viewed as successful if serious frictions are avoided between the states and both sides succeed in managing tension, or if their relations are preserved in a stagnant form? How can it be evaluated if cooperation is developed only in a few selected areas? Based on minimal criteria, one can view the U.S.–Russian relationship during the Bush–Putin period positively. Conflicts have been prevented on issues that Washington and Moscow view differently. One

can then view relations between Washington and Moscow during the Clinton–Yeltsin years as a stunning success since both sides tried to work within the partnership paradigm. The irony is that a lack of substance in the U.S.–Russian relationship, especially during the Bush–Putin period, has helped to avoid more serious friction. However, judged by maximalist criteria, this relationship fits the crisis formula.

One of the triggers that increased mistrust between Moscow and Washington was the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004, which Moscow continues to this day to believe was instigated by the United States. Another was the realization that the United States did not intend to remove its presence from the CIS, which Putin saw as treacherous. The ex–KGB lieutenant colonel, accustomed to thinking in defensive clichés, decided Russia was being encircled. The last blow to what remained of the Kremlin’s trust in the United States was suspicion that the White House saw democracy as a means of subverting the Russian state. It is difficult to judge how far the Russian elite and the president himself believe this. It is not inconceivable that at least some occupants of the Kremlin deliberately invent American bugaboos in order to make the U.S. threat seem more credible. It is also possible that they really do believe that the United States is seeking to weaken Russia. Even moderate Russian politicians now voice suspicion of Washington, asking why Washington is surrounding Russia with a NATO fence and missile defense, warning that it will inevitably provoke a defensive Moscow reaction. In any case, if the Bush–Putin meeting in Ljubljana in June 2001 was a turning point in their personal trust, their summit in Bratislava, Slovakia, in February 2005, when the leaders publicly confronted each other, publicly demonstrated a virtual end of their rapport.

U.S. assistance to Ukraine and Georgia and its readiness to discuss their NATO membership, and Washington’s mild criticism of Russian domestic policy have only deepened resentment in the Kremlin. When U.S. vice president Dick Cheney, in Vilnius in May 2006, accused Moscow of using oil and gas as “tools of

intimidation and blackmail” and of having “unfairly and improperly restricted the rights of the people,” his comments brought a storm of indignation in Moscow. Even Russian liberals viewed it as evidence of a double standard to lecture Russia on democracy yet embrace the authoritarian leaders of Central Asia. Still, this was not the lowest ebb of the relationship.

Meanwhile, Washington stopped pretending. In the spring of 2006, a prominent American thinktank, the Council on Foreign Relations, published a report on relations between the United States and Russia, prepared by a task force headed by Senator Jack Kemp and former vice presidential candidate John Edwards. “U.S.–Russian relations are clearly headed in the wrong direction. Contention is crowding out consensus. The very idea of ‘strategic partnership’ no longer seems realistic,” wrote the authors of the task force, calling for an alternation of “selective cooperation” and “selective opposition” or even “containment” of Russia.⁵ Moscow struck back with a report of its own, prepared in the Kremlin, in which the United States was accused not only of trying “wherever possible to encroach on Russia’s interests,” but also “of continuing to work surreptitiously toward a Russian version of the Orange Revolution.”⁶ From now on, nothing could prevent the cold shower from getting colder.

When in the spring of 2006, Senator John McCain and Representative Thomas Lantos demanded that Russia be expelled from the G8, they were expressing an opinion widely held in Congress. Even liberally inclined members of the American establishment, like Strobe Talbott, called for a review of U.S. policy toward Russia, saying that the term *partnership* was outdated when talking of Russia, preferring *engagement*. Senator Richard Lugar, who is generally benevolent to Russia and who has made a great contribution to the U.S.–Russian partnership, strongly criticized Russia alongside Venezuela and Iran for having used its energy policy as a form of blackmail.⁷

Bush, however, recognized that despite all the problems, he could not allow the tension to escalate. Washington’s problems

were piling up, including Iran, and it wanted to restrain Putin’s assertiveness. Nevertheless, any shift by Bush to harsher policies with regard to Russia may be seen as an admission that his policy of partnership with Putin had been a failure. Despite many calls to boycott the St. Petersburg G8 summit in the summer of 2006, Bush went to Russia. In the fall of 2006, Russia and the United States reached a bilateral agreement on Russia’s WTO membership. These measures mollified Putin, who looked happy and relaxed at the signing of the Russo–American protocol, which opened the way for Russia to join the WTO. At that moment, one might conclude that although Putin had used anti-Americanism in his domestic policy, he was not ready to allow relations with America to deteriorate further. Soon it would become obvious that the logic of losing trust has its own dynamics.

On February 10, 2007, Vladimir Putin gave a speech in Munich that some perceived as the start of a new Cold War between Russia and the United States. Addressing German chancellor Merkel, U.S. defense secretary Robert Gates, Senator McCain, and other Western leaders present in the audience, Putin lashed out against what he called the unipolar world and again delivered a well-known laundry list of Moscow’s grievances against Washington. The United States “has overstepped its national borders in every sphere,” exhibiting “ever greater disdain for the fundamental principles of international law,” Putin said.⁸ Little in Putin’s speech was new. The president and other Russian leaders had expressed the same grievances many times before. Instead, the audience was caught off-guard by the emotion and energy of Putin’s speech, which suggested that he had come to Munich with the express purpose of getting a few things off his chest.

The audience was also taken aback by Putin’s intentional rejection of political correctness. It was no secret that Russia’s relationship with the West, and particularly with the United States, was far from perfect. In public, however, Western leaders followed the rules of the game and tried to couch their disagree-

ments with Moscow and displeasure with Putin in diplomatic language. Putin cut to the chase and said what he thought of the United States, thereby exposing the full extent of the problems in Russian–U.S. relations. As he did not offer a solution to the problems, however, Putin’s candor only made the situation worse by confirming the widespread opinion in the West that improved relations with Russia are highly unlikely during his tenure. Even Putin’s supporters in Russia were perplexed by his speech. “This was a chance for Putin to set out a coherent vision of Russian foreign policy for the remainder of his time in office. Regrettably, this opportunity was squandered,” analysts close to the Kremlin complained.⁹

What prompted the Russian leader to deliver such a shock to the West, and to the United States, above all? Some Russian observers have suggested that Secretary Gates had aroused Putin’s ire when, in remarks to the U.S. Congress at the beginning of February, he grouped Russia with such so-called rogue states as Iran and North Korea. This is far from true. Others maintain that Putin was responding to the U.S. plan to install elements of a missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, although the announcement hardly came as a surprise, since Washington and Moscow had been discussing the issue for nearly a year.

Putin’s outburst in Munich was to be expected. It was sparked by several factors, starting with the president’s attempt to blame Washington for the collapse of the policy of partnership between Russia and the West. Perhaps he was beginning to consider his foreign-policy legacy and did not want to be remembered as the president who had “lost the West.” Putin’s speech was also intended to beef up his image in Russia as a strong leader, particularly among the elite, in response to its growing concern over identifying candidates to succeed him in 2008. The president wanted to show both the world and the Russian population that Russia could speak from a position of strength on the world stage. He may have hoped to exploit the anti-

American mood in Europe as well as differences of opinion between the United States and its European allies.

Putin’s Munich speech reconfirmed how the Russian president and the Russian elite view their partnership with the United States. They see it as a way to mutual concessions and reciprocity, as a zero-sum game. Moscow perceives Washington’s lack of willingness to respond to Russian sensitivities as its intention to weaken Russia and to marginalize it in the international arena. The Russian elite has no doubts that Washington is using “slogans of democratization” to “get access to Russia’s natural resources.”¹⁰ A whiff of Cold War in the air has become apparent. Yet, as though to prove wrong those doomsayers who predict deep crisis and even imminent confrontation in relations, Putin in Munich pushed the pendulum in the opposite direction. He praised President Bush as his personal friend and invited the U.S. defense secretary to visit Russia, demonstrating the art of handling the “partner-opponent” in Russia’s foreign policy. Americans, stunned by Putin’s speech, nevertheless played down the seriousness of the rift, undertaking to smooth growing tensions and launching an aggressive diplomatic dialogue with Moscow to assuage the feelings of the Kremlin.

Chapter 20

BUMPS IN THE ROAD

Bush's efforts to woo Russia could not change the vector. Both leaders were moving to the end of their tenures, and neither had the time nor the energy to reverse the dominant trend. The spiral of mutual frustration could hardly have been prevented, taking into account the Kremlin's need to use the United States as a foreign bogeyman for domestic purposes. Russia's strong-arm rhetoric might have been softened by U.S. "preventive" efforts to embrace Russia, for instance, by including Russia in developing the joint missile defense program (an idea Moscow had first raised in 2002). The Bush administration, bogged down in Iraq and overstretched in the global arena, did not pay much attention to Moscow's complaints. "We've done enough coddling of Moscow!" some American observers would say. "Russia is acting like a bully and needs a tough response, not embracing," others would reiterate. From the Russian side, General Yuri Balujevsky, chief of the Russian General Staff, was pretty unequivocal, retorting, "Russia's cooperation with the West on the basis of forming common strategic interests has not helped its military security."¹ Both sides were pushing the ball in the same direction, though in a different way.

The U.S. side for quite a while has been expressing concerns about the state of democratic development in Russia and the

derailment of democratic reforms, though mostly through private channels. Recently, the concerns have assumed a more public profile. One example: the comments of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary David Kramer on May 31, 2007, in Baltimore, which made a real splash and were perceived as a reflection of what the U.S. administration really thinks about Putin's Russia. Kramer did not mince his words, describing a rather bleak picture of Russia's domestic situation: "Suppression of genuine opposition, abridgement of the right to protest, constriction of civil society, and the decline of media freedom are all serious setbacks. They are inconsistent with Russia's professed commitment to building and preserving the foundations of a democratic state.... The backsliding is multifaceted." Washington was taking the more publicly critical position on Russian domestic developments that it had previously avoided.

In April 2007, the State Department published its report, "Supporting Human Rights and Democracy," with a negative assessment of the state of democracy in Russia. Russian parliamentarians responded by approving a resolution that expressed concern over what they called growing and unprecedented attempts by the United States "to interfere in Russia's internal affairs" and even its "provoking extremist sentiments." When he signed into law legislation supporting a Ukrainian and Georgian bid to join NATO, Bush added to simmering tensions. In his state-of-the-nation address on April 25, 2007, Putin launched a stinging attack on the United States. "The flow of money from abroad used for direct interference in our affairs is growing. Not everyone likes the stable, gradual rise of our country. There are some who are using democratic ideology to interfere in our internal affairs," said Putin sternly. Those "some" Putin had in mind, of course, included the United States.² Finally, in his speech on May 9, Victory Day, the Russian president said: "The number of threats is not decreasing. They are only transforming and changing their guise. As during the Third Reich era, these new threats show the same degree of contempt for human life and the same claims to world exclusiveness and

diktat." The U.S. embassy in Moscow received assurances from the Russian Foreign Ministry that President Putin had no intention of likening the U.S. administration's policy to that of the Third Reich, but few observers doubted the opposite. One might get the impression that the relationship between the two countries had returned to the pre-Gorbachev period.

During the first term of Putin's presidency, Washington put Russia on the back burner, which explained the lack of U.S. interest in this part of the world and its lack of effort in building a more comprehensive strategy regarding it. Today even if the American establishment understands the significance of Washington's relationship with Moscow, the timing is bad for a fresh breakthrough or even for a smoothing of the relationship. In any case, the arsenal of U.S. instruments for dealing with Russia appears limited, and the U.S. administration has had difficulty in managing the partner-opponent formula of the relationship pursued by Russia. Having no other solutions, the West and the United States have begun desperate efforts to preserve the status quo in their relations with Russia, preventing further deterioration. The Kremlin has succeeded rather skillfully in using both American acquiescence to Russia and American attempts to deter Russia's resurgence game. Russian politicians and government officials like Sergei Lavrov could now afford a condescending tone toward Washington, offering (not without irony) to "help the United States to make 'a soft landing' in a multipolar reality."³

By the end of the Putin and Bush terms, one could get confused by the contradictory nature of the relationship between the two countries. The United States and Russia have continued their cooperation on counterterrorism, which appears intensive. The U.S.-Russia Counterterrorism Working Group has been meeting to discuss law enforcement, weapons of mass destruction, terrorist financing, counternarcotics, man-portable anti-aircraft missiles (MANPADS), and transportation security. Nuclear cooperation and nonproliferation cooperation are all in the positive category. In summer 2007, a so-called 123 Agree-

ment to promote civilian nuclear energy cooperation was ready to be signed. Under the START Treaty and the Treaty of Moscow, 7,000 nuclear warheads have been deactivated, and 600 ICBMs and 600 SLBs destroyed. Both countries have renewed (until 2013) the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program launched to facilitate the dismantling of weapons of mass destruction. At their July 2006 summit in St. Petersburg, Bush and Putin announced the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, with the goal of preventing nuclear materials from falling into terrorist hands. Russia and the United States continue to work on the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy Agreement, which includes enhancing nuclear-fuel-cycle security and the fuel-center initiative. They also continue to work on defense technology cooperation and have begun consultation on post-START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) arrangements (the START Treaty expires in 2009). Both countries have worked closely, despite their many disagreements, over North Korea and Iran (Russia voted in favor of the UN Security Council resolutions on North Korea and Iran), and in the framework of the NATO-Russia Council.

Business relations between the U.S. and Russia have also demonstrated a positive trend. Many American companies that vowed they would never go back to Russia after the 1998 financial meltdown have been back in a Russian market that has been increasingly lucrative in recent years. According to official U.S. sources, American investment in Russia shot up by 50 percent in 2005. Top U.S. companies including Alcoa, Coca-Cola, GM, Procter and Gamble, and Boeing, which in 2006 signed an \$18 billion deal to buy Russian titanium, have increased their stake in Russia. In spring 2007, Boeing initiated a contract valued at as much as \$2 billion with the Russian airline for the purchase of at least fifteen long-range jets.⁴

Thus, relations between the United States and Russia are complicated and multidimensional. Initiatives in the security area and progress in business relations are apparent but they have not been followed by the extension of constructive coop-

eration to other levels of partnership, where disagreements continue to prevail. Most importantly, they have not brought mutual trust and have failed to mitigate points of contention that have become more prominent. Among these are Russia's policy toward its neighbors and internal Russian trends.

In the final stages of the Bush and Putin tenures, the two sides have been at loggerheads over three contentious issues that simultaneously reflect the substance and limits of the U.S.–Russian relationship: *Iran, missile defense deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic, and Kosovo.*

The continuing Iranian saga demonstrates Russia's concern over American influence. George Perkovich was right when he wrote, "If North Korean or Iranian nuclear weapon capabilities complicate the freedom of [the] U.S. power projection, Russia and China may not see this as entirely bad." Some political circles in Moscow have behaved as though a nuclear Iran would be less dangerous than an American attack on Iran or increased American leverage in the region. We should not, however, oversimplify. Not all Kremlin initiatives have been motivated by a desire to flex muscles or block America and the West, or from a sheer desire to weaken it. Even the pro-Western minority in Russia has been concerned over the straightforwardness of American diplomacy, fearing that the Iraq scenario might be repeated in Iran (a concern shared by China and France). Moscow does not want another Iraq on its borders. At the same time, Moscow has become more apprehensive about Iranian recklessness. Though reluctantly, Moscow supported the United States and its allies in the Security Council twice (in December 2006 and March 2007), approving sanctions against Iran. In the spring of 2007 the Kremlin let it be known that it would not allow Tehran to use tensions between Moscow and Washington to play Russia against the United States.

By March 2007, Russian plans to involve Tehran in negotiations and persuade the Iranians to clarify all International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) concerns failed. Iran refused to stop its most sensitive nuclear activity, proving that Moscow

had no impact on its policy and could not use Iran as a bargaining chip in trade-offs with the United States. The Russian elite and its leader have understood that Iran's continuing defiance has narrowed Russia's options and been a blow to its reputation. By offering to share the Russian radar facility in Azerbaijan with the United States, Putin proved that he recognized the Iranian threat.

In analyzing the cooling of the relationship between Moscow and Tehran, Dmitri Trenin concluded that the key explanation was not security concerns but business. Russia, with its "national champion" Rosatom, which dealt with the atomic industry, was serious about pursuing its interests globally, including in the United States. That meant significantly greater dividends than Moscow could get in Iran. Economic interests were pushing Russia closer to the West on the Iranian nuclear issue.⁵ Whatever the motivation was, it has been a welcome sign, one that proved Moscow and Washington could narrow the field of their disagreements, at least in this area. However, it is too early to tell how sustainable this coming together will be when the Kremlin's attitude toward the United States is dictated by domestic circumstances. There is no evidence that Iran is ready to reverse its nuclear course, and it is difficult to predict how Russia would react to possible further punitive measures against Iran.

In the spring of 2007, U.S. plans to deploy elements of missile defense in Poland and the Czech Republic became another point of contention in the Russo–American relationship. In fact, it was an example of how to create a problem from nothing. The rationale behind U.S. intentions is dubious. Either Washington had not thought about the Russian and European reaction, did not care about it, or misjudged how much its missile defense plan would rile the Kremlin. The Russian outcry could have been prevented if Washington had agreed to involve Moscow in the building of the joint U.S.–NATO–Russia missile system, as the Russians had been suggesting for several years. In any case, considering deteriorating relations with Russia, the deployment

ity to provoke suspense and shake up the world without any agenda.

Moscow's outcry had two practical results: first, Europe was unhappy with the United States, finding itself again hostage to relations between Washington and Moscow; second, Russian hawks in the power structure had a pretext to ask for increased defense expenditures.⁹

Meanwhile, the Kremlin has continued its "politics of threat." In May, in his final address to the Federal Assembly on the state of the nation, Vladimir Putin announced Russia's moratorium on implementing the CFE treaty (Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty). The Kremlin's argument seemed irresistible: in 2001 the United States had unilaterally withdrawn from the ABM treaty, explaining that Russia and the U.S. were no longer enemies. "Fine, if we are no longer enemies, then why this fuss about the CFE?" seemed to be the retort. It was difficult to disagree with that. The return to bickering over Cold War relics reflected not only the degree of worsening of the U.S.–Russian relationship, but also a lack of coherent strategies in Washington and Moscow for responding to post–Cold War challenges.

Another point of contention on the U.S.–Russian agenda was Kosovo. Moscow disagreed with the plan proposed by UN special envoy Martti Ahtisaari to grant Kosovo limited sovereignty under international supervision, and insisted that the plan had to be agreeable to Belgrade. Richard Holbrooke, who struck the Dayton deal to end the Bosnian war, immediately jumped in, warning that "European security and stability, and Russia's relationship with the West, were on the line." This message was interpreted by Moscow as being a threat to Russia: "Don't get in the way!" when the Kosovo issue is discussed at the Security Council. Holbrooke's warning only strengthened Russian readiness to say "Nyet!"—returning to the Soviet practice of responding negatively to American initiatives—and to threaten to veto any plan for Kosovo's independence. It is true that Moscow, having no constructive solution to regional conflicts either within or outside the former Soviet space, prefers to postpone the set-

tlement "until better times," which leaves Russia with bargaining chips and the possibility of linking those conflicts with other international issues and anticipated trade-offs. The Russian daily *Kommersant* had a tough comment for the Russian tack in the continuing Kosovo crisis. "Moscow is simply trying to postpone a decision on Kosovo, hoping to use it in its effort to regain its role as an influential actor in the Balkan game," it said.¹⁰

The feeling is that the Russian position on Kosovo has been more contradictory than that and it does not boil down to simple cynicism. Indeed, having only recently ended (at least formally) its war with Chechnya, Russia views Kosovo's independence with deep apprehension. Despite Moscow's threats to exploit the Kosovo "precedent" by recognizing post-Soviet secessionist territories, the Russian political elite is wary of such a perspective and wants to avoid such a precedent, as do other European countries having separatist forces (Spain being an example).

Irrespective of hidden motives in its delaying tactics and a desire to increase its leverage, Moscow has been right in reiterating that the Serbs are not prepared to accept calmly the loss of a province that means so much to their national identity. At the same time, Russia has allowed Belgrade to use itself as it was used by Milosevic. Again, Moscow could find itself in the same position of losing leverage with Serbia and ending up provoking bitter feelings toward Russia in the Western capitals.

There are few good solutions to the Kosovo endgame. In March 2007, Mark Medish suggested a framework for a negotiated deal that offered a chance for a breakthrough in the Kosovo quandary: essentially "land for peace," plus European integration. The elements of the deal included recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty, followed by a fast membership track for Serbia into the European Union, and a referendum for the northern Serb enclave in Kosovo on association with Serbia. Some variant of this framework, if accepted by the parties, could lead to a durable settlement. We may know soon whether the United States, Europe, and the other parties are ready for such a break-

through. If the chance to negotiate a comprehensive framework to settle Kosovo's status is lost, the major reason might not be the "Russia factor"—indeed Moscow seems to have kept open the door for last-minute diplomacy—but principally the insistence of the United States on imposed outcomes and the hesitancy of Europe to propose credible alternatives and to offer Serbia a place in a united Europe. Depending on how events develop, Kosovo could remain for some time a political variable in Russia's relationship with the United States, not least because of its ramifications for other "frozen conflicts" such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

These issues have seriously clouded U.S.–Russian relations at the end of Bush's and Putin's presidencies. If not those issues, then other problems might have emerged, such as Georgia's attempt to join NATO, which would have triggered a deterioration in a relationship that has been lacking trust. The Russian president continued to play hardball, forcing the world to freeze in consternation. At a press conference on the eve of the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, on June 1, 2007, Putin again lashed out at U.S. plans for antiballistic missiles in Europe, noting that "for the first time in history ... elements of U.S. nuclear potential are appearing in Europe," adding, "We absolve ourselves of responsibility for our retaliatory steps." He warned that the American shield would turn Europe into a "powder keg," accusing the United States of an "almost uncontrollable hyperuse of force."¹¹ The day before that press conference, the Russian government announced that it had successfully tested a new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with multiple warheads that could penetrate any U.S. antimissile shield. Several days later, however, during the G8 summit, Putin unexpectedly proposed a solution. He suggested to Washington the joint use of the Gabala (Azerbaijan) radar station.

It was a brilliant tactical move. The Russian leader proved to the Russian audience that he could be both a tough defender of Russia's interests and a peacemaker. By raising tensions and

calming things down, Putin demonstrated to the world that the Kremlin still had an impact on high world politics. In some European states, the Russian president was seen as a problem solver rather than a troublemaker. For the United States, Putin put Bush in a seemingly lose-lose situation. Should Bush refuse Putin's offer, he would prove that the American missile system was directed against Russia; should he accept Putin's offer, he would demonstrate that Russia can dictate terms to the West. By offering Americans the Russian radar station, the Kremlin recognized the Iranian threat and agreed to build an anti-Iranian nuclear shield. Not only in Russian public opinion, but in European public opinion as well, Putin looked like a leader who offered a basis for discussion and joint effort that Washington should have thought about a long time ago. The Russian president appeared to be an excellent tactician who skillfully used the mistakes of the other side. However, tactical victories do not guarantee successful strategy.

Chapter 21

THE BUSH–PUTIN LEGACY

On July 1, 2007, President Bush invited Vladimir Putin to his family's summer home in Kennebunkport, Maine, to sort things out. The result of the "lobster summit" perfectly fit the current model of the U.S.–Russian relationship. As the *Economist* put it, "The two men agreed politely to disagree a lot and co-operate a bit."¹ Putin moved closer to Bush on Iran. Both presidents agreed to start extensive cooperation on civil-nuclear power and to continue dialogue on a new framework for strategic nuclear reductions to replace the START 1 Treaty. The Russian leader continued his "surprise offensive," suggesting to Bush new and unexpected ideas on missile defense cooperation, "We believe that the number of parties to this consultation (on missile defense-LS) could be expanded through the European countries.... We propose establishing an information exchange center in Moscow.... A similar center could be established in one of [the] European capitals.... We are prepared to modernize the Gabala radar. And if that is not enough, we would be prepared to build a new radar." In return Putin expected Bush to abandon the idea of deployment of the missile defense elements in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Vladimir Putin gave his shrewd take on the meeting: "Well, basically, we may state that the deck has been dealt, and we are

here to play. And I would very much hope that we are playing the same game." Bush was even more reassuring, giving a positive assessment of their meeting, "We had a very long, strategic dialogue that I found to be important, necessary and productive."²

Putin was still enjoying a friendly lunch at Bush's vacation home when one of his tentative successors, Sergei Ivanov, warned that Russia would be ready to move its missiles closer to Europe if Washington pushed ahead with its missile defense plans. Several weeks later, the Kremlin introduced a moratorium on the CFE treaty, continuing its macho posturing. Putin and Bush were definitely not playing "the same game," as Putin had hoped in Kennebunkport. This was anticipated. Putin could not backtrack; he had to look strong in the eyes of the Russian elite. Besides, there were all the signs that he believed he had a chance to restructure international relations and Russia's role at a time when the United States was losing the initiative.

The spat around the U.S. missile initiative and Moscow's world-shaking retaliation said a lot about the state of U.S.–Russian relations, the nature of leadership in both countries, their ability to make strategic decisions, and their capacity to foresee the consequences of those decisions. It was hardly a prudent decision for Washington to move ahead with a missile defense shield at Russia's frontiers, especially when the Russian elite is preparing to solve the presidential succession issue. The decision to proceed provided additional ammunition for the Russian elite to consolidate the nation by returning to a militarist mentality. Besides, after several years of growing mistrust, it was difficult for Washington to persuade the Russian audience that the American shield was neither directed against Russia, nor could it be used against Russia in the future. The Kremlin's behavior at that time was driven by domestic imperatives and principally by the logic of the self-perpetuation of power, which trumped all other considerations. To control this process and guarantee continuity of power, Vladimir Putin has to demonstrate that he remains the only political factor and a formidable force. An especially tough stance in relations

with the United States is one of the most effective ways for the Kremlin to prove that. This time it did not stop at using situational toughness with the West. It went further, making an effort to secure a more prominent role for Russia, which (it hoped) would inevitably lead to the gradual dismantling of the unipolar world, or would at least undermine unipolarity. Putin apparently hopes that other world players, including some in Europe, might help him at least to shake the tree. In any case, in the spring and summer of 2007, tensions and squabbles between Washington and Moscow have been viewed in Russia as a test of U.S. dominance and its ability to defend it. There has been a lot of bluff as well as elements of “let us try and see what happens” in this new Kremlin course. So far, the Kremlin has observed redlines it was not ready to cross. It has backed down each time its game threatened to damage relations with the United States beyond repair.

In fact, both Bush and Putin have demonstrated that they are not ready to let tensions escalate into a serious conflict. The Russian leader has invented a formula: when criticizing America he sings the praises of his “friend George.” It could become a regular practice for the Russian president to emphasize the “friendly status” of the relationship with the United States, which would work either disarmingly or perplexingly on his American counterpart. All this reflects a new style of Russian diplomacy toward the United States, invented by Vladimir Putin, that can be defined as: “We are friends with you folks, and that means we have the right to tell you what we think about you.” The Russian leader, having become skilled in juggling incompatibilities in Russian domestic politics, has proved he can do the same in foreign policy.

President Bush in his turn has continued to woo president Putin, suggesting carrots, including offers of cooperation on the missile defense program. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has been intentionally mild in her comments when discussing Russia. In April 2007, during a heated debate with the Russians, she admitted that there were “tensions” and expressed concern

over a state that “suppresses dissent.” She nevertheless concluded, “We have a pretty good strategic relationship with Russia.” (In May 2007 Rice allowed herself to be more candid, saying, “On many things we have done very well, but the fact is that on some others it’s been a difficult period.”)³ On June 1, 2007, Bush himself called the Washington–Moscow relationship “complex”—a term previously used chiefly to describe U.S. relations with China.

It is generally understood that the U.S. administration has decided to prevent further backsliding in its relationship with Russia in the interest of solving key U.S. issues. Washington has offered a new formula for dealing with Russia, one that Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried has commented on: “Although ours may not be a strategic partnership, it includes partnership on many strategic issues.”⁴

Continuing to pursue *realpolitik*, Washington has been trying to find more subtle tools to demonstrate its concern over Russia’s vector by, as David Kramer put it, “pushing back when we must, privately when possible but publicly when necessary, in defense of our values.”⁵ This approach could be an example of the “transformational diplomacy” advocated by Condoleezza Rice that intends to find a synthesis of idealism and realism.⁶ Still, with the Bush term coming to an end, Washington needs simply to preserve the status quo, having no time left to devise a new strategy. As for Putin, continuing his anti-American rhetoric, he has been shy of any action. So far his bark has been worse than his bite. Both sides have moved toward a new stage in their relations that has become a combination of more realistic expectations of each other mixed with mutual disenchantment and prejudice.

There has been a powerful force driving both the U.S. and Russian presidents to pivot: the ticking of the clock. A lack of new ideas, a legacy of setbacks and frustration, and, more importantly, the lack of an effective framework to deal with complicated international issues and the uncertainty of Russia’s

future explain why the two leaders were stymied in efforts to change the atmosphere. By the end of Bush's presidency, Washington found itself at a dead end, without opportunities to take action regarding Russia that had any chance of improving mutual understanding. A partnership with a state that structured itself on alien terms has been impossible. Confrontation would be destructive for both the United States and for global security. Washington could not afford to isolate and marginalize Russia, as it needs Moscow's support to resolve a whole series of issues affecting U.S. interests. Besides, isolation would merely make Russia more unpredictable. Attempts to pressure the Kremlin would be futile since no Russian leader will take anyone's advice; the Russian public would see doing so as a sign of weakness. On the other hand, indulging the Russian regime encourages statist policies in Moscow and its desire to continue its assertiveness.

As for the Kremlin, its foreign policy has acquired a momentum that would be difficult to alter. Moscow continues to use the United States as an enemy, demonizing it and viewing U.S. hegemony as a constraint against Russia's revival. Thus, the field for constructive dialogue with Washington has narrowed. Even if Moscow and Washington were to agree on a policy toward Iran and North Korea, possibly reaching agreement on other issues and flash points, a return of relations to their previous levels of optimism would hardly occur.

The outgoing leaders have no time left to reorder priorities or come up with new initiatives. Bush has to concentrate on Iraq, which is central to American politics. Russia has already become a side issue in U.S. politics. As for Putin, he too is likely preparing for his exit from the Kremlin. The moment has come for crisis management, conflict prevention, and damage control. Both countries are awaiting the appearance of new governing teams unburdened by what happened in the past. Until then, the most the outgoing teams can do is to keep the dialogue going and avoid generating new tensions. The cyclical and up-and-down character of the U.S.–Russian relationship reconfirms the con-

clusion that it has deep roots. In some areas the American and Russian vectors are irreconcilable, at least at this historic juncture, which undermines agreements on common interests. Many expected the opposite outcome, with common interests softening structural incompatibilities. That has not happened. Summing up the evolution of U.S.–Russian relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union, one could argue that in the area of security both states have managed relations well in eliminating the threat of a nuclear confrontation despite Moscow's constant concern that Russia is being encircled. In reality, no one in the Kremlin believes a U.S. attack on Russia is feasible, and hardly any Americans believe that Russia might become a serious adversary. In terms of America's impact on Russia's transformation, the conclusion seems unexpected: the Russian political elite has succeeded in using U.S. realpolitik, and even the very existence of the United States, to strengthen the centralized state and perpetuate its authoritarian regime. One could argue, however, that without American attempts to help Russia's transformation, the result might have been worse.

Pondering the evolution of relations between the two countries in the last years of the Bush–Putin tenures, Robert Legvold predicted “either the status quo plus or the status quo minus,” explaining that, in the first case, “the uneasy balance between cooperation and discord will continue,” and in the second case that the relationship could “descend to another level.”⁷ There are domestic and foreign policy drivers in both countries that work in favor of the continuing stagnation of U.S.–Russian relations, which include the shifting balance between cooperation and disagreement. For the time being, there are factors that push both sides to “keep company” with one another, but such socializing comes of necessity. To be sure, the section of the Russian establishment that sees its survival as depending on close relations with the West would try to avoid further distancing itself from the West, which is a crucial prerequisite of Russia's cooperation with the United States. The question remains, however: will both sides contain the logic of distrust and its ramifications?

With presidential elections approaching in both countries, during which the “Russia card” and the “America card” could be played (though hardly actively in the United States), it seems unlikely that relations will seriously improve or that any improvement would be sustainable. During the previous election campaign, the Republicans made a point of attacking Clinton and the Democrats for having “lost” Russia. This time a similar maneuver may be expected from the Democrats. In Russia, anti-Americanism has become a criterion of patriotism for the Russian elite, which parades it vigorously at election time. The Democrats’ victory in the U.S. mid-term elections in fall 2006 deepened Moscow’s sense of foreboding because of its stubborn belief that relations are traditionally less relaxed with the Democrats than with the Republicans. Russian politicians were evidently overlooking the fact that U.S.–Russian relations were conducted very much along Cold War lines during Reagan’s terms in office, and they were a good deal warmer during Clinton’s presidency.

The new arrivals in the Kremlin and the White House will inherit a difficult legacy. They will have to redefine the relative importance that Russia and the United States have for each other and decide what the best political and conceptual framework is for their relationship.⁸ Having sized each other up, Moscow and Washington will have to deal again with the backburner “cooperation package” of the war on terror and energy security, now complicated by the politicizing of the issue (not without Russia’s involvement). They will need to restart the dialogue on nuclear disarmament.⁹ The long-standing agenda, known only too well in both capitals, includes such positive, however marginal, achievements as cooperation in the conquest of space and the peaceful use of nuclear energy, which will help to keep the U.S.–Russian relationship afloat. If the new leaders decide to reenergize their dialogue, they will have to ponder new challenges and think about the compatibility of their interests in addressing them, which means going beyond the well-known list. One would expect small steps to be more feasible

than grandiose projects. Thus, Sergei Lavrov’s initiative, addressed to NATO, on cooperating in fighting drug trafficking from Afghanistan is a step that could revive cooperation between Russia and NATO in the struggle against the Taliban. There is growing understanding in Russian political circles that the anti-American orientation of the new Afghan opposition will sooner or later acquire an anti-Russian flavor. More large-scale ideas have been on the table for a long time, including building a joint U.S.–NATO–Russia missile defense system. Breakthrough initiatives—like cooperation between Russia, Europe, China, and the United States in Central Asia and between Europe, Russia, and the United States in the Caucasus, not only in achieving common security goals in those regions but in enhancing their modernization—and joint efforts in rebuilding the Russian Far East and Siberia, do not seem plausible today.¹⁰ The success of any project ideas for a future Russo–American relationship will depend, finally, not on the personal chemistry of their leaders but on how both states deal with systemic incompatibilities.

Experience shows that if Russia and the United States continue to move within the current paradigms, it would be overly optimistic to expect that the new leaders in Washington and Moscow will succeed in building a stable and productive relationship solely on the basis of the common interests of their countries. The divergence between their civilizational standards will inevitably produce different interpretations of those interests Moscow and Washington are assumed to share. Take international terrorism, for example. Moscow and Washington have yet to agree on a definition of a terrorist organization. The United States classifies Hamas and Hizballah as terrorist organizations, while Moscow does not. This means that the mere quantity of issues discussed will not lead to functioning Russo–American cooperation. Without a shared normative outlook and political will to find points of consensus, one cannot exclude that their dialogue may instead serve to deepen existing mutual prejudice.

How can consensus be reached if each side looks differently at the world and its role in the world? One has to be aware that the United States continues to strengthen its hegemony, viewing it as the guarantee of its national interests, which is incompatible with the existence of any other state's longing to be a geopolitical pillar, especially when that state promotes different values. Russia, on the contrary, is again trying to secure its comeback as a global power, which for the Russian elite is key to Russia's existence. It perceives the United States as a constraint, which means that so far Russia and the United States have competing strategic agendas.

At this time, seeking points of mutual engagement, quite apart from its results ("dialogue for dialogue's sake"), might be a way to prevent Russia and the United States from drifting further apart while they wait for more substantial grounds for their partnership to appear. We have, however, to avoid excessive hope that the new initiatives of the new leaders, their personal relations, and an active dialogue will build an opportunity "to start anew," that this time will be successful. Deliberating on how to restore U.S. relations with Russia, former adviser to President Bush, Thomas Graham, has defined the principle of reciprocity. The American approach should be "to respect Russia's choice and preferences," "recognize Russia as an integral part of European civilization," and "demonstrate understanding of the problems Russia is facing." The American side should expect Russia to "refrain from interpreting our appeal to common values as a cynical ploy," to be "aware of the difficulties the U.S. is facing," and to "recognize that they themselves are responsible for the state of affairs in Russia."¹¹

The key precondition for productive cooperation or selective partnership between Russia and the United States is a strengthening of U.S. multilateralism and its active engagement of Russia, as well as the transition of Russia to democratic standards. If those conditions are absent, a repetition of the vicious circle that we have been watching will be inevitable, with new hopes becoming mere delayed disappointments.

Might we expect U.S.–Russian cooperation to promote Russia's integration with the West and help Russia's modernization? Its results could be contradictory. As noted, so far this cooperation has helped Russia to preserve the status quo. The existence of the United States has been used by the Kremlin to consolidate its current system of rule. Yet history sometimes allows for unpredictable and seemingly unrealistic things to happen, such as Gorbachev's foreign-policy breakthrough, which helped the Soviet Union's liberalization. Theoretically, a new foreign-policy pattern that could be reflected in a real, not imitation, partnership between the United States and Russia might facilitate a new round of democratization in Russia. This could be successful not only should Russia suddenly get its own de Gaulle or Churchill in the Kremlin as well as a change of mood toward democratization within the political class, but also if the United States makes Russia's integration into the West its mission. Today the suggestion sounds too idealistic, but the future may offer new chances to make it possible.

It would be naïve to hope that, should Russia restructure itself on a democratic basis, relations between Russia and the United States would be perfect and the tensions between their interests much less destructive if shorn of Russia's normative hostility. One can anticipate that U.S. hegemony will continue to be a key irritant, even for a democratic Russia, simply because of its history, tradition, and mentality. There are grounds for optimism as well. First, the Russian elite, despite its anti-American feelings, tries to be integrated into the West on the corporate and personal level; second, there are no deep roots of anti-Americanism within the Russian population; third, the United States and Russia will definitely be allies in the event of geopolitical and civilizational conflicts; fourth, American and Russian societies have so far been the only societies with messianic aspirations ready to pursue goals that are not directly linked to their pragmatic economic interests. This fact can make them future partners in pursuing a global agenda.

For now, the suspicion the elites of both countries feel toward each other inevitably affects the attitudes of the wider public. In 2006, 43 to 47 percent of Russians had positive feelings toward the United States, whereas in the 1990s that figure reached 68 percent. An analogous trend is seen in the United States. In 1997, 20 percent more Americans viewed Russia more positively than negatively, while in 2006 the proportion was 53 percent favorable and 40 percent unfavorable. Happily, the cooling of relations between “official” Moscow and Washington has not led to a marked rise in hostility between individual Russians and Americans. On the whole, Americans continue to have a benign attitude toward Russia, with 71 percent of those surveyed hoping that Russia will become a democracy in ten years’ time. Russians have a more favorable perception of the United States than many Europeans do. In 2006, 43 percent of Russians were positively inclined toward the United States, as against 39 percent of the French, 37 percent of Germans, and 23 percent of Spaniards. There is, however, an indisputable trend for the perception of the United States among the Russian public to worsen. In early 2007, the number of Russians favoring closer ties with the United States was 13 percent, against 31 percent who favored closer ties with countries that oppose American influence. In spring 2007, during the escalation of anti-American propaganda, 43 percent of the Russian respondents believed that the United States constituted a threat to other countries because of its longing for economic domination. Thirty-three percent blamed it for its attempt to “spread American-style democracy.”¹² The anti-American propaganda gushing from Russian television sets continues to have an effect.

One can only hope that the common sense of ordinary people will not allow relations to deteriorate to the point of a real freeze. We need to recognize, however, that a new cycle of mutual suspicion is inevitable as long as the two countries have different outlooks and base their lives on different principles.

Chapter 22

UNSTABLE STABILITY, OR ON SHOOTING YOURSELF IN THE FOOT

The world has given up discussing Russia’s reforms and is now more interested in how stable Russia is and whether it is going to let off fireworks while the rest of the world tries to get on with its business. There are no visible signs to suggest that the system that Russian presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin have set up will be undermined in the near future. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that society is stable and under control. Let us not forget, however, that this is Russia, a country that constantly surprises observers with sudden U-turns. What seems solid today may turn into tectonic lava tomorrow, threatening to submerge not only Russia but to spill out beyond its borders.

Let us enumerate the factors that ensure order in Russia. The price of oil is crucial to Russian stability. Oil revenues flow into the Stabilization Fund, which is the regime’s safety net. If there is social tension, the authorities can dip into this pocket and calm things down by handing out money to the malcontents. Economic revival continues, which keeps the part of society with consumer appetites happy. People have not yet fully recovered from their weariness after the upheaval of the Yeltsin era, and its memory is one of the crucial factors of stability in post-Yeltsin Russia; even when dissatisfied, people have no

burning desire to take to the streets and demand policy changes. They are disillusioned with the opposition, both of the left and the right. They are in no hurry to support it and are content to wait for new faces to appear. Remnants of the old opposition from the Yeltsin times have lost their combativeness but continue to occupy niches of protest, merely hindering the appearance of a more dynamic and, for the Kremlin, a more dangerous opposition. The Kremlin is also adept at stealing the opposition's more appealing slogans. It has succeeded in bringing on board celebrities capable of influencing public opinion, and these are now working for the Kremlin, hoping for various favors in return. The directors of major theaters are hoping for new theater buildings; the directors of leading hospitals are hoping for new equipment; performers hope to perform at top venues; politicians want money and the Kremlin's support for their election campaigns and a promise that they will be reelected; political advisers hope for permanent employment at high salaries. In short, the political and intellectual classes have signed on.

Particularly noteworthy is the loss of the intelligentsia's old spirit of dissent. Present-day society lacks that ferment of dissatisfaction that the intelligentsia and dissidents provided in Soviet times. The regime is in fact not too repressive (yet!), allowing those in opposition to survive, if only after driving them into a ghetto and restricting their access to the public. The oppositionists socialize with one another through clubs, the coteries of the few remaining small opposition parties, and finally on the Internet. That there are such safety valves creates the impression of some level of freedom. The Kremlin and its spin doctors are to be congratulated on the ingenious way they have clogged the political arena with clones formed and financed by the Kremlin: parties, mushrooming youth movements, a public chamber, and a state council. These fronts create the illusion that there is an active political life and reduce opportunities for the emergence of vibrant social and political movements.

The Kremlin is constantly ready to react to shifts in the public mood. If the populace is upset by the regime's social welfare policies, the Kremlin initiates "national projects" to improve social welfare. If people are tired of corruption, the Kremlin reacts instantly by arresting a dozen corrupt officials, many of whom are subsequently quietly released. When people are irritated by the privileges granted to the authorities and bureaucratic apparatus, the latter quickly decide to remove the flashing lights from their cars that give them priority in traffic. This tactic of reacting rapidly to discontent works. The regime, of course, is also reaping the benefit of a reaction that always appears after revolutionary upheavals: the period of stabilization as the population gradually recovers from the agitation of a period of radical change.

Of course, for slumbering Russia, the institution of leadership is immensely important. When everything is vague and fragile, when there is no sense of progress, and when faith in the future has evaporated, society sees its salvation in its leader. People see the corruption of the regime but place the leader above officialdom, exempt him from criticism, and, even though they are aware of the extent of his culpability, have no desire to part with their remaining illusions about the only political institution with power resources—the presidency. Russia's attitude to Vladimir Putin is, however, gradually beginning to change. If initially he was supported because people hoped he would revive Russia, he is now a president of hopelessness, supported because the populace can see no alternative.

It is amazing just how self-contradictory the attitudes of post-Soviet citizens can sometimes be. In early 2007, 32 percent said they were satisfied with the country's progress, while 65 percent of respondents said they were dissatisfied. Only 12 percent believed the economic situation in the country would get better, and 14 percent thought it would get worse. Sixty-nine percent expected no change for the better. Only 25 percent of those surveyed believed the government could improve the situation, and 16 percent had no faith that the government would do any-

thing. Despite this, an overwhelming majority of people, 77 percent of those surveyed, approved of the president's actions (against 22 percent who did not), even though they knew very well that his is the only real authority in the country and it is the president who controls the government they view as pathetic.¹ Russians continue to see the president as being above politics, his regime, and his system, and they seek in this way to retain at least some belief in order, since rejecting a leader in a country that has no other institutions threatens chaos.

People in Russia no longer take any interest in politics because they do not see how it can help them to improve their lives. A gap has opened up between people's personal interests and the tools of politics. Only 26 to 34 percent of Russians under age forty follow political events; among those aged fifty years and above, the number rises to 46 percent. This is the departing generation, knocked out of action by the failed revolution of the 1990s. The political apathy of Russians surprises observers who, when they compare Russia and China, conclude that the Chinese are far more acutely aware of injustice and more actively express their dissatisfaction with the authorities (to judge from the 87,000 protest demonstrations and strikes in China in 2005).² Among Russians, only 3 percent of those surveyed in 2006 said they would take to the streets to protest against actions by the authorities. The majority prefer to express their discontent by whining, as they did under the Soviet regime. Local protests, which are a constant feature in Russia, attract no mass support or even sympathy from the rest of society. It really appears that the bulk of the population, following all the accumulated stress and endless misfortune they have experienced, have given up looking for a way out, lost the will to fight back, and have resigned themselves to their misfortunes.

This appearance of apathy and indifference may, however, be deceptive. Slowly but surely systemic factors are emerging that will gradually undermine this docility. There are three such long-term factors, engendered not by adventitious circumstances but by the way society is organized. The first is the fun-

damentally illogical nature of democratically legitimized authoritarianism. The regime's determination to retain power obliges it to fix election results, which weakens legitimacy, and a regime that has lost legitimacy can be repudiated at any moment. The second factor is the regime's determination to maintain the status quo while simultaneously redistributing resources. This pits one elite group against another and destabilizes the political situation. The third factor is the inevitable appearance of discontent when power is excessively centralized. If popular discontent cannot be expressed in parliament and the mass media, it will sooner or later spill out into the streets. In addition to these systemic factors, others can appear: conflicts between the centralization of power and the greater independence the regions need for their survival; between the regime's attempts to manage business and the needs of the market; and between state expansion and its attempts to control society and the population's aspirations to run its own affairs.

Russia is truly providing ever more evidence for the view that a system constructed on the principle of "transmission belts" of power—top-down governance—can work only if a flawless mechanism of subordination is in place. The latter is maintained primarily through fear, secondly through violence, and thirdly through a mobilizing ideology, which in the case of Russia used to be communism. If any one of these modules is missing, the pyramid of power starts to be shaky. What do we have in Russia? The security ministries are corrupt and cannot protect the authorities effectively. In some factions of the population the old fear of authority is embedded in the population's genes. It has been reawakened, forcing people to return to the Soviet type of passivity and of paying lip service to official policy. In other segments of the urban population, especially among the younger generation, fear of the Kremlin evaporated during Yeltsin's time. These people can hardly be consolidated on the basis of a mobilizing ideology. Moreover, in a centralized system, the breakdown of any one of its branches causes the breakdown of the entire system since all its elements exist in a

pyramid of subordination. The lack of independent institutions to resolve conflicts between interest groups means that the conflicts destabilize the system from within. When conflict is hidden, the political process becomes more unpredictable, and a centralized system is impotent in the face of unpredictability.

The population is also being freed from direct dependence on the state. Forty-five percent of Russians say they are already independent of the state. A considerable portion of these people withdraw into private life. Quite often they are dissatisfied with the way the authorities operate but do not protest because they are able to survive without them. Russia's status quo is built on the reciprocity principle: the authorities allow society to choose its own way of survival on condition that it will not meddle in politics, and it anticipates that the people will tolerate the authorities' means of survival. However, the moment the regime impinges on the interests of the people, they will seek to unite and may challenge the Kremlin. In Russia, groups of malcontents have begun to organize spontaneously, such as motorists, investors cheated of their money, mothers of soldiers, and environmentalists. This is civil society in the making, with millions already drawn into it. It is soon going to create problems for a state that does not recognize the rule of law and continues to harass people. There is also the fact that all of Russia's political institutions are dependent on the president's approval rating, a fall in which would jeopardize the entire system.

We should not overlook *the law of unintended consequences*. On more than one occasion, the regime has produced effects quite the opposite of what it expected. The attempted monetarization of welfare benefits in kind in 2004, intended to reduce the state's spending on social welfare, came to an abrupt end when the authorities took fright at widespread popular protest and threw millions of extra dollars into pacifying it. The Kremlin's meddling in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election in support of a pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich eventually benefited the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko. The 2005 gas conflict with Kiev was intended to strengthen Gazprom's position as

a supplier of hydrocarbons but only obliged Europe to look elsewhere for its energy supplies. The Kremlin's astonishing capacity for shooting itself in the foot is evident in the regime's determination to shield Iran from sanctions, which leaves it pandering to extremist regimes near Russia's borders. There is no guarantee that the law of unintended consequences will not apply again when the Kremlin, attempting to consolidate its position, finally saws away the bough on which it is sitting.

A measure of the regime's anxiety about the possible reactions of a society that it understands less and less is the extent to which the ruling team is preoccupied with mimicry, creating pro-Kremlin parties, docile movements, and associations that will either divert public activism into a safe channel or at least disorient the population. Rebellious youths have only to start setting up their own movement along the lines of the protest movements in Ukraine and Serbia when another movement of the same name (set up by the Kremlin) springs up instantly and takes to the streets. The resulting confusion makes it more difficult to organize real protests.

Confirmation of the authorities' fears and anxieties is also to be seen in its attempts to remove even the remotest chance of an initiative unsanctioned by the Kremlin during the election campaign. Accordingly, throughout 2005 and 2006, the Duma, at the behest of the Kremlin, was frantically passing amendments to electoral legislation to ensure that the "party of power"—as the pro-Kremlin's party of the moment, United Russia, is dubbed—was victorious. The Kremlin either bans all forms of protest or intimidates protesters while simultaneously seeking to discredit them in the eyes of the public. Protest actions by the now-banned National Bolshevik Party, brutally suppressed by the authorities in 2005–2006, were the first sign that a possible era of street protests is to be expected in Russia, where opportunities for the legal expression of dissatisfaction are denied. Yet the suppression of extremist protest did not help. Soon, new protest formats emerged, among them the most hated in the Kremlin: the Other Russia opposition movement formed in

2006 by former prime minister Mikhail Kasianov, former world chess champion Garry Kasparov, the leader of the National Bolsheviks, and writer Eduard Limonov, known for his radical views.³ The first attempt of the Other Russia to organize a dissenters' march through the streets of Moscow took place in December 2006 under banners demanding the defense of freedom. The authorities banned the march, although they had previously allowed demonstrations by the communists and the nationalists. The Other Russia was given permission to gather only in the square. Two thousand people calling on the régime to observe the constitution were surrounded by eight thousand militiamen, soldiers, and riot police with dogs and the latest technology for dispersing demonstrations. Overhead, militia helicopters circled, and the movement's supporters were arrested on all manner of pretexts even before they reached the square.

The opposition, however, did not get scared and took to the streets regularly. The dissenters' marches in March–April 2007 in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Nizhni Novgorod ended with ugly scenes of dissenters being roughed up, people's skulls being broken, and harassment and beating of the press. The authorities prepared thoroughly for an "intimidation operation," summoning reinforcements of riot police from all over Russia, hoping that provincial security forces would not be soft on the protesters. The world was shocked by the brutality of the law-enforcement organs. Even the press representative of the presidential administration had to admit that the reaction of the law-enforcement agencies to the dissenters' marches "was exaggerated." Some observers thought that the authorities were driven by fear and behaved foolishly, damaging their own reputation. The motivations behind their intimidation tactic, however, are likely more complicated. There was no reason to suppose that at this time the Kremlin feared losing power, having as it did such an amazing presidential approval rating. Several thousand protesters in the streets (even with five thousand protesters in St. Petersburg) hardly presented an immediate

threat to the government. Nevertheless, it was the growing insecurity of the Kremlin clans, unsure of their future and with a continuing paranoia because of the example of the 2004 Ukrainian "Orange Revolution," that prompted them to use preemptive measures to frighten potential dissidents and the opposition. They wanted to make it clear that they were ready to use force without hesitation to nip protests in the bud. Harassing dissenters also sent a message from Kremlin hard-liners, not only to a potential opposition, but also to competing clans within the Kremlin. The message boiled down to the following: "Don't get in our way!" In this manner, the Kremlin brought an end to the Gorbachev and Yeltsin epochs of tolerance for political struggle.

The authorities do not conceal their suspicion that the dissent is the result of foreign meddling, that the Other Russia movement and its members are Western stooges, and that all the dissenters' marches have been part of a covert operation to destabilize Russian society. It is difficult to tell whether Putin and his team really believe this or whether they need to invent a pretext to move to a harsher regime. Finally, there is widespread speculation that the use of violence on the streets of major Russian cities has one further and possibly primary explanation, an attempt by hard-liners to ruin Putin's reputation, especially in the West, and to force him to stay. We can only speculate as to how grounded these suspicions are. "The Kremlin now has its external and internal enemies," wrote the Russian daily *Novaya gazeta*. "It is armed and ready for the upcoming elections, or to revise the constitution."⁴

The dissenter marches in the spring of 2007 and the state's brutality against street protesters might become the watershed that ends a period of soft authoritarianism and opens a new period, one that could mean sliding toward harsher authoritarian rule. If this were true, to what extent is Putin personally responsible for that slide? It is hard to believe that the decision to crack down on the Other Russia movement and the street protests could have been taken without his knowledge, which

leads to the conclusion that the president may have been the one to cross the line first. If the crackdown happened without his knowledge, then it means that he has begun to lose influence, a conclusion that is less plausible. Perhaps the president has behaved in his usual way: informed about a problem, he mused, letting his subordinates guess what it was that he really wanted. One tough decision that he acquiesced to silently meant the beginning of a tough policy, with all levels in the chain of command trying to be "more catholic than the pope." This is typical of Russian government's top-down decision making. One word from Putin: "Stop!" is enough to stop the harassment of the Russian opposition. In May 2007 the president remained silent, and his silence gave the state carte blanche to clean house. It had to, simply because in the view of Kremlin strategists any tolerance of the opposition will bring more people to the streets next time, which may turn Moscow into Kiev and Red Square into Maidan Square. This would mean the end of the Russian system, which can function only by keeping the lid on the kettle. Sooner or later, however, this kettle will blow up.

Independent Russian observers (and there are still quite a few of them) writing on Internet sites predict that the actions of the authorities sooner or later will provoke the young to take to the streets. They will do this to demonstrate their disagreement with the Kremlin's desire to keep them under control, herding them into government-sponsored organizations. Russian journalist Andrei Kolesnikov wrote, "There are signs that the mood of dissent is starting to spread in society and increasing numbers of young people are beginning to sympathize with the protest rallies simply because they do not want to allow the authorities to impinge on their rights to have their own views."⁵ The All-Russia public opinion research center has registered that in 2007 more than one quarter of the population has been willing to take part in rallies and demonstrations (in 2006, 17 percent were prepared to do so). According to the Levada Center, the protest constituency in Russia in 2007 amounted to 20 percent of the pop-

ulation. An editorial in the pro-Kremlin journal *Expert* expressed real concern: "Million of protesters in London against Blair's Iraq policy would not bring [the] British state to collapse, but an opposition rally of 100,000 in Russia could abolish the system."⁶

The more busily the Kremlin's spin doctors try to mold a domesticated "civil society," shutting off every escape valve for protest, the more likely it becomes that a section of real society will decide to move outside the tightly controlled political arena. A structured opposition integrated into the system is a precondition for a stable state and society. Forcing the opposition out of politics is always damaging to the system. No less than 61 percent of Russians want a genuine opposition, only 25 percent disagreeing. Some 47 percent do not believe they have such an opposition, as against 30 percent who do.⁷ The Russian people are waiting for effective opponents of the regime to appear, and demand always stimulates supply.

New techniques of organizing street protest will undoubtedly be seen, paralleling what has occurred in a great variety of countries from Serbia to China. Protest can suddenly flare up, organized, for example, through text messaging. Internet communication is a tried-and-tested means of bringing protesters out into the streets, as witnessed in Ukraine and Belarus. To call a meeting of several thousand people who do not know one another, you do not need political parties, access to television, or a leader. You need only to put out an appeal on the Internet that strikes a chord with your audience, and you will have a flash mob event. How will the Kremlin's cumbersome machinery for preventing organized protest cope with such an elusive, spontaneous element that can spring up at any time anywhere? The authorities would have to shut down the Internet, which is hardly possible. If they tried to do that, the Kremlin would soon learn the elementary truth that the strength of public protest is directly proportional to the extent to which a society is hermetically sealed. The collapse of the Soviet Union showed how closed systems come to an end. Has this lesson been lost on the post-Soviet Russian authorities?

Chapter 23

WHAT MIGHT DETONATE AN EXPLOSION?

An alarming element in present-day Russia is the development in the North Caucasus of clannish regimes of a totalitarian nature supported by federal bayonets and subsidies. Moscow has become hostage to peripheral dictators like Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya and to other sultanistic regimes it created in an attempt to stabilize the situation in the region. Now those dictators and their clans are blackmailing the Kremlin, demanding ever more money and power. In the process, they are passing all responsibility for the situation in their republics on to Moscow. North Caucasian sultanism strengthens anti-Russian and Islamic sentiment in the region and creates a basis for terrorism, not only in Chechnya but also in other North Caucasus republics. In 2005 an attempt at armed revolt with Islamic slogans took place in Nalchik, the capital of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. The revolt was directed against law-enforcement agencies guilty of atrocities and was crushed with exceptional brutality. This uprising was a warning that the population, and primarily young people, might take up arms against corrupt local regimes or, indeed, against Moscow, which supports corrupted local authorities. A chain reaction of protest could easily explode throughout the region.

The Kremlin finds itself facing a deadlock in the North Caucasus. The attempt to impose presidential rule from Moscow is

likely to provoke a new Caucasian war in which both the local elites and those who oppose them—who until now have been tearing at each other's throats—will unite against Russia. To leave things as they are is tantamount to turning the region into a zone that is bristling with weapons, parasitic on Russia, heading in the direction of Islamic fundamentalism, and increasingly threatens the stability and integrity of Russia itself. Already, detachments of paramilitaries from the North Caucasus are extending their activities outside their own republics. Units from the Chechen security forces, which comprise mainly ex-rebel fighters, are turning up fully armed in the central regions of Russia and are helping to resolve business disputes. The soldiers of the Chechen Vostok Battalion, headed by clan leader Sulim Yamadaev, intervened in St. Petersburg. He had been hired by one of the competing sides in a commercial conflict. Kadyrov paramilitaries, led by his security ministers, went to Moscow and murdered his opponent in a busy Moscow street while Russian law-enforcement agencies turned a blind eye. Who is to say that one of the contending factions within the Kremlin will not hire the Chechen units to decide the power struggle in Moscow? Armed to the teeth, turbulent, and increasingly fundamentalist, and counting among their populations a growing number of uneducated and unemployed young people, the North Caucasus could destabilize the whole of Russia. This is a real concern of the Russian population: 44 percent of Russians do not believe the war in Chechnya is over; about 65 percent think that the situation in the whole North Caucasus is unstable; 10 percent think it is explosive; and only 16 percent believe that it is calm. This is the legacy that Yeltsin and Putin have left the next Russian president.¹

There is a danger also from situational factors that today work in favor of stability but tomorrow may have the opposite effect. The Russian authorities have virtually no contingency plans for the possibility of a fall in the price of oil, smugly assuming that the energy appetites of China and India, together with the war in Iraq, will keep it at a high level. Other tools of

the regime for ensuring stability are the popular movements created by the Kremlin. Who is to say that such youth movements as *Nashi* (Ours), *Mestnye* (Locals), and the *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Young Guard) will not go the same way as the nationalistic *Rodina* (Motherland) Party? After being likewise set up by the Kremlin, *Rodina* became a loose cannon because of the ambitions of its nationalistic leader, Dmitri Rogozin. The Kremlin had to remove the Motherland Party from the Moscow elections and expel some of its overly ambitious politicians.

It might be more difficult to keep even the pro-Kremlin youth movements on a leash. The gangs of young Putin supporters created by the Kremlin in the wake of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution started by harassing opposition politicians Garry Kasparov and Mikhail Kasianov and then went after foreign diplomats, attacking the British and Estonian ambassadors. The young are playing the game with evident enthusiasm, becoming more aggressive each time. They have already understood their strength and are eager to do “big projects.” The moment may come when the young wolves will feel they are being manipulated and will want to become an independent force. And someone might emerge who will lead this destructive blind force that can be turned into a dangerous political weapon. The Russian authorities may never have read the story of Frankenstein and seem unaware of how experiments creating monsters may end.

Finally, let us consider the paradoxes of the president’s approval rating, which for now is working in favor of stability. In 2006, of the 76 percent of the population who said they supported President Putin, only 17 percent considered him a successful leader. The rest believed he was unable to cope with the tasks he should be dealing with, with the exception of foreign policy. The paradox of support for a leader who is considered unsuccessful only serves to confirm the hopelessness that is rife in Russia: the people support a leader whose possibilities and potential they consider limited because there is no one else. Yet

Vladimir Putin has to leave the political scene and his approval rating cannot be transferred to his successor. This fact might have a serious destabilizing effect.

The growth of nationalistic sentiment and xenophobia in Russia is even more alarming. Xenophobia has always been endemic in Russia, but it was never allowed public expression. It hid behind imperial ideology. Now ethnic nationalism is often fanned by factions within the ruling elite. In its search for external or internal enemies, the elite focuses on immigrants, the West, liberals, or those of the newly independent states who do not want to come under Russia’s wing. When the representatives of the establishment talk about banning particular ethnic groups from certain professions and introducing quotas for immigration, it further incites the xenophobes. The anti-Georgian campaign unleashed by the regime during one of its periodic confrontations with Tbilisi in the fall of 2006 shows that ethnicity can become a driver of both Russian foreign and domestic policy.

The forces of law and order do not react to increasingly frequent racially motivated assaults on Tadjiks, Chechens, Armenians, and others of non-Slavic origin by skinheads. The lack of reaction shows that the authorities do not know what to do about the ethnic aggression that is spreading through the land. Its underlying causes continue to accumulate. The general atmosphere of the fight against terrorism provokes suspicion of non-Russians. The growing corruption and arbitrariness of the government authorities engender a sense of powerlessness. Social and regional stratification arouses envy among the dispossessed, of the better-off strata of the population or of national groups, which stick out among the majority Slavic faces. A desire to find an object for retaliation is the result. Nationalism and xenophobia are the simplest and most primitive defense reactions of people when survival is difficult. Channeling aggression toward “aliens” (immigrants, non-Slavs) is advantageous to the regime and the bureaucracy. Today some 56 percent of Russians support the slogan “Russia for the

Russians." Polls demonstrate that the size of the nationalist vote in Russia has grown over the past ten years from 25 to 40 percent. In 2007, 30 percent of Russians were conscious of interethnic tension, while 64 percent did not feel it, and 6 percent were "don't knows." In Moscow, however, the number of those conscious of it is much higher (58 percent) versus 40 percent who are not aware of it, and 2 percent who "don't know."²

Regular pogroms and racist killings in several Russian cities (St. Petersburg, Voronezh, and Moscow) began in 2003. Since 2005 they have occurred almost monthly. According to data from independent centers, 450 people were attacked and injured in racist attacks in 2005, and 500 in 2006. The rising wave of racism is disturbing. Even the Kremlin is beginning to worry and is easing off, moderating the dose of its nationalistic messages. If, however, some Kremlin factions begin to assert that their "Russian project" "does not mean victimizing other nationalities," others continue to call for the defense of the rights of the "indigenous population" and stir up hatred for "aliens." A public that is fearful and unsure of its future becomes susceptible to simplistic ideas, of which "Russia for the Russians" is the most readily understood. In the process, the struggle against fascism and extremism has been devalued by the regime itself, since it continually applies these epithets to the opposition. The upshot is that Russia is approaching a transfer of power in an atmosphere in which the ruling group has unleashed national-populist moods, trying to maintain an archaic mentality and suspicion of the outside world, which, for some social groups, might be far more attractive than communist, social-democratic, or liberal alternatives.

In this context certain developments may be important. The growth of Russian nationalism may undermine imperialist moods that have lingered in the popular consciousness. The evolution of some Russian politicians who had previously proclaimed imperial slogans (Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Dmitri Rogozin, for instance) and who have now exchanged their expansionist rhetoric for isolationism should be confirmation

enough of this evolution. Russian analyst Emil Pain, however, alerts us to a new phenomenon, which he defines as a "revival of the imperial syndrome." This syndrome means imperial sentiments blended with nationalism. This explosive mix may become a key obstacle to the democratization and modernization of Russia.³

In the fall of 2006, a succession of assassinations took place in Moscow at a level that shows that Russia is still far from achieving anything resembling normality. They were the murders of the first deputy chair of the Central Bank, Andrei Kozlov, who was well known as a consistent champion of an ethical financial system, and of one of the most outstanding journalists of the opposition and a champion of human rights, Anna Politkovskaya. As if a signal had been given that it was once again all right to murder competitors and opponents, one killing followed another—of bankers, people in business, top officials, and mayoral candidates. Russians returned to the 1990s, when contract killings were the most effective way of resolving problems. Unexpectedly, society discovered that the assassins had never gone away. They are again in demand. Under Yeltsin, yearly 19 people were killed for every 100,000 of the population, while under Putin the figure is now 22. In the United States, 5 people for every 100,000 are killed, while in Europe there are 1 or 2 murders for every 100,000. Russia has the third highest rate in the world for the murder of journalists, after Iraq and Algeria. During Putin's presidency 13 contract-style killings of journalists have occurred, and this despite the fact that Russia boasts no fewer than 550 law enforcement officers for every 100,000 of the population, as against 300 in Europe.

Russia's relapse into resolving problems with small arms tells us some unwelcome truths about Putin's legacy. The president has not fulfilled the task he set himself upon assuming office—to restore order and ensure the personal safety of the population. That the state is not based on the rule of law has resulted in a society that lives according to the law of the jungle. The rise

to power of members of the security ministries and their lack of accountability at least partially explains why violence has become a political tool. It is less important whether the president himself initiated this change or whether it is the fault of his entourage or the logic of the neo-patrimonial regime. What really matters is that a shift has occurred in Russia toward more violence and the use of brutal force in political and everyday life.

It is an unrewarding task to speculate about how stable a closed social system can be that works in its own interests. Let us imagine an unexpected combination of untoward events: the radical reform of the outdated and still subsidized housing, an increase in fuel bills, transport snarl-ups in major cities, a rise in the rate of inflation, unrest among students who are to be drafted into the army, a technical failure like the 2005 power shortages in Moscow; a series of ethnic riots; and terrorist acts and the usual inability of law-enforcement organs to effectively respond to them. These events might well stir up the most stoical and inert of societies. But in Russia, any surfacing of discontent is cause for concern, not only for the regime but also for civil society. Social tension in the absence of powerful liberal democratic forces, in a country where liberal democracy itself is automatically associated with a worsening of living conditions and where there is a lack of a consolidated group of pragmatists who understand the need to reform Russia, will play into the hands of populist nationalism. If a lurch to the right were to happen, we would have to agree with those occupants of the Kremlin who mutter darkly that today's regime is the acme of civilization compared with what might replace it. The whole problem, of course, is that today's authorities have provided the basis for a populist national tide, and the longer the present system continues, the stronger that tide may become.

Increasingly, there are signs that the ruling elite, outwardly so confident, has been less and less certain of its future. "We are downright scared," one of the stars in the Kremlin firmament admitted. This is only too evident from the furious setting up of tame organizations, the support for servile politicians, the exclu-

sion from public view of independent individuals, the petty-minded control of elections, and the isolation of society from Western influence. An indication of the ruling class's anxiety about its future in Russia is the extraordinary burgeoning of the Russian population of London and other Western capitals, the continuing draining from Russia of billions of dollars' worth of what is now known as "capital export," and the reluctance of Russian business to invest in Russia. The same mood of uncertainty manifests itself among ordinary people as consumer frenzy. People are not saving. They are spending today because they have no faith in tomorrow.

Society, noting the agitation of a regime that tries simultaneously to intimidate it and to be liked by it, sees that the authorities lack self-confidence. It also sees that this lack in itself can invite tests of its durability. Thus, one has to be prepared for any unexpected turn of events in Russia, not least something the regime may itself instigate as it tries to forestall adverse circumstances.

Chapter 24

RUSSIA: GOING NOWHERE FAST

After the fall of communism, Russia faced a challenge that no state in the world had faced before. Not only did it have to give up its global mission to be the pole of an alternative civilization, spheres of influence, and its territorially integrated (contiguous) empire, it also had to radically alter the principles on which the state and society were organized. Russia had to renounce a project it had been attempting to implement for centuries, one it seemed at times to be doing entirely successfully. That these challenges had to be faced simultaneously and that they were interrelated, contradictory, and multidimensional, made it exceptionally difficult to respond to them. Russia nevertheless seems to have rejected the instruments of mass repression, territorial expansionism, the regulatory role of the bureaucracy, and the sanctity of personalized power. It has tried to adopt the fundamental values of the West: the rule of law, the primacy of the rights and freedoms of the individual vis-à-vis the state, and the right to private property. These values were set down in a constitution that, for the first time in Russian history, acknowledged and declared: "The basic rights and freedoms of the individual are inalienable and belong to each person from birth." Previously, rights and freedoms in Russia were something that only the higher authorities could bestow.

The Russian political class, however, proved incapable of introducing Western values in practice. The Russian elite, taken unawares by the collapse of the USSR, never considered leaving the Soviet period behind completely and creating a law-governed state. It limited itself to devising new ways of realizing its group interests. It can no longer be doubted that, at the present stage of Russia's historical development, liberal democracy has suffered a defeat.

The hybrid produced through the efforts of presidents Boris Nikolayevich and Vladimir Vladimirovich tells us that Russia has failed to take on board liberal principles and Westernize, but neither does it want to return to the classic Russian system (even if it did, perhaps it is too late because the clock has been broken beyond repair). Power in Russia remains personalized, but it is no longer rooted in the public mind as something inevitable and God given. In effect, the Soviet model of the bureaucratic state has been revived, only now without the communist ideology and its former repressive mechanisms. Society has emerged from a patriarchal culture but has not yet fully evolved into a new culture, and random fragments of the old and new cultures coexist in its consciousness. In trying to imitate the rule of law, pluralism, and freedom while hanging on to top-down governance, Russia is immobile and now finds itself either becalmed or marooned, in the doldrums of history, unable to move forward or backward, stuck between civilizations and historical epochs. Its future direction is unclear. At home, there is a desire to disguise the emphasis on authoritarianism as democracy. Abroad, Russia lays claim to a partnership with the West and membership of Western organizations, all the while openly opposing it. On the one hand, Russia regards itself as part of Europe and European culture, which it really is. On the other hand, Russia's politics and the organization of its power and society remain alien to Europe and the West generally. The attempt to combine incompatible elements is masked by exercises in mimicry that are presented as pragmatism. In reality, they point to the inability of both the ruling

class and Russian society to leave the past behind (or a lack of energy for this), although they also have no wish to remain in the past indefinitely.

Russia is made up of contradictions, and the disparity between appearance and reality in the country is likely to confound observers who prefer precise calculations. It may sound absurd to many Russians at least, but it might well be more difficult for Russia to transform itself according to the norms of European civilization than it would, for instance, for China and some Southeast Asian countries. Deliberating on the liberal-democratic transformation of Southeast Asia, Francis Fukuyama wrote that “traditional political Confucianism ... could be jettisoned relatively easily and replaced with a variety of political-institutional forms without causing the society to lose its essential coherence.” In his view, Asian democracy could be built “not around individual rights, but around [a] deeply engrained moral code that is the basis for strong social structures and community life.”¹ In contemporary Russia because of the lack of a “deeply engrained moral code” and other mechanisms that could guarantee social coherence, the task of building a new political system might prove to be a harder and less predictable exercise. The Russian state and society are still organized around principles that are not compatible with liberal democracy.

Here I have in mind not only the primacy of the state. After all, all societies were built on this principle, some of them only recently, at the end of the twentieth century. They managed not just to abandon this principle, but also to find ways to combine the legacies of their historical, cultural, and religious traditions with the liberal-democratic rules of self-organization. In the Russian case, the primacy of the state has always been linked, not just to its superpower status, but also to the existence of real or imagined threats, both internal and external, which in turn required the militarization of people’s everyday lives and the subjugation of the very foundations of society to militarist goals. In short, Russia developed a unique model for the sur-

vival and reproduction of power in a state of permanent war. This situation was maintained even in peacetime, which was always a temporary state in a Russia that was constantly either preparing for war against an external enemy or pursuing enemies at home. As Russian political scientist Igor Klyamkin explained, “Russia has always developed by annihilating the boundary between war and peace, and its system simply could not and still cannot exist in a peaceful environment.”² The militarist model has been intended to legitimize the supercentralized state in the eyes of the people. In its militarization and its view of the world around it as hostile, Russia differs from other countries that have consolidated on the basis of the primacy of the state before transforming themselves and placing the interests of society and the individual above those of the state.

Putin’s presidency has demonstrated, perhaps unwittingly, both the possibilities and the limits of using elements of militarist thinking to preserve the traditional state. On Putin’s watch the Kremlin has returned to the tactic of seeking out “enemies” in both Russia and abroad in order to justify the centralization of power. Among the enemies “appointed” by the Kremlin, we find Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, the West, nongovernmental organizations, liberals, and oligarchs. To date this tactic has worked well, but it has its limits. At some point the witch hunt could lead to a battle between clans within the elite, as happened under Stalin. Such a battle would begin to undermine the stability of the state and the security of the elite. This model also hampers the dialogue between the Russian elite and the West as well as the elite’s ability to use the West to ensure its own survival. The Kremlin evidently recognizes the limits of the militarist paradigm. It is trying not to cross the line beyond which Russia would remove itself from the community of developed nations, marginalizing itself, something the political class tries to escape. This fact proves how far Russia has extricated itself from the past, even in trying to perpetuate some of it.

Vladimir Putin has been exceptionally lucky in his leadership. The sky-high price of oil and surging world demand for

hydrocarbons have allowed the president to conduct a new experiment using the traditional Russian paradigm. He has tried to remove militarization as the foundation of the Russian state, leaving only some of its fragments and stereotypes, and to replace it with the energy superpower model. The elite views energy resources as a key instrument of both “hard” and “soft” power as well as a guarantee of Russia’s global status and the centralized state. The substitution of energy for militarism has been successful, but because of the nature of energy resources and Russia’s increasing integration in global economic interdependencies, this new means for preserving the primacy of the state has a limited potential. As Russia’s energy resources approach exhaustion, continued reliance on them could ultimately undermine the old Russian system, generating rot and degradation. It remains unclear how and when this might occur, whether it would eventually bring down the centralized state, and what would replace it.

Westernization and democratization of Russia may lead to the very result nationalists and anti-Westernizers have predicted: not just the undermining of the old state, but its evolution toward a looser federation or confederation, or even the fragmentation of Russia. Yet the attempt to prop up an archaic state by using such artificial political prostheses as energy resources and hunting for “enemies” will make the final act even more dramatic. It remains to be seen when the elite will recognize that in its current form Russian civilization has spent itself and how this elite might try to reform Russia before it becomes impossible to preserve it within its current borders and in its current form.

Meanwhile, it seems that Russia is still firmly held in the embrace of its political tradition. Does this mean it will forever be the hostage of its history, geography, culture, and form of governance, imposed on Muscovy centuries ago by the Golden Horde of the Mongols? Is there no suggestion from history that the Russian nation might be capable of adopting freedom? Even Richard Pipes, who usually inclines toward pessimism where

Russia is concerned, acknowledges that there have been exceptions to Russia’s totalitarian tendencies in its history. He sees the Novgorod Republic as such an exception, which during its rise in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries “encompassed most of Northern Russia, granted its citizens rights which equaled and in some respects even surpassed those enjoyed by contemporary Western Europeans.”³ There were other times of progress when Russia began to introduce civil rights and freedoms. Among these were the Assemblies of the Land of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the reign of Peter the Third with his edict guaranteeing the freedoms of the gentry and the demilitarization of the state; the decrees of Catherine the Great, who borrowed ideas from the European Enlightenment and tried to adapt them to Russia; Alexander II’s local government, legal and military reforms, and his manifesto on the emancipation of the serfs; the October Manifesto of 1905; the convening of a State Duma; and the reforms of Piotr Stolypin. Russia’s history has not been an unmitigated tale of autocracy. Russia constantly borrowed Western principles of governance and adapted them to its needs. However, these reforms did not weaken autocracy but gave it a new lease on life.

The failure of the liberal-democratic project in recent years is seen as confirmation that Russia is incapable of living in freedom not only by supporters of Russia’s great-power status but also by some Western observers. The failure is grist for the mill of those who see Russian development in terms of cyclical theory, from liberalization to restoration and back again, or in the context of continuity theory, as the constant replication of a traditional matrix. Both these theories reflect a fatalistic view of Russia as doomed to be an autocracy and facing nothing but ruin if it ceases to be. This narrative might seem to confirm that conclusion, but matters are much more complicated. Russian history is neither a mechanical shifting between reform and counterreform (one step forward, one step back); neither is it circular, though it often appears to be. In reality, each successive reform moves Russia a little further forward, driving society

toward greater openness. Successive restorations do not take the country back to its starting point, but leave a little more freedom. The Putin restoration does not take Russia automatically back to the Soviet Union. It is a backsliding that nevertheless leaves society to its own devices. The regime appears to be telling the population, "Do as you please, only do not try to seize power." Leaving society alone, giving it the right to seek its own salvation (but not the right to interfere in politics or claim ultimate control over property) is an advance in terms of social autonomy compared with the communist period, when the regime aimed to keep society entirely straitlaced.

Russia is gradually coming out of its shell, opening up to the world in a way that cannot be restrained for long. Not even Russian traditionalists want to live in a hermetically sealed country like North Korea. After each warming of the climate in Russia there is a reversion to personalized power and state lawlessness, but each time, the regime loses some of its earlier might and is obliged to retrench and limit its power and ambitions, and try to look civilized.

The time is coming when the political regime will no longer be able to function in an authoritarian way. It will be unable to provide what society requires of it: stability and a higher standard of living, not to Soviet but to Western levels. We may find that the current period is the last gasp of an authoritarianism whose return was possible only because of the pain of the Yeltsin reforms, its chaotic way and its failure, and the high price of oil. Together these may have artificially prolonged the life of a system that is already expiring and historically doomed. Thus, Russia passes through its cycles and circles, but each time it does so at a different level and in a new historical context. The attempts to understand Russia's developments by addressing its tradition, mentality, and culture tend to be instructive but insufficient to explain new aspects of Russian life or to provide any real clue as to what its next stage may be.

If liberal trends were cut short in the early twentieth century because society was not yet ready for freedom, the defeat of

Russia's liberal project in the early twenty-first century is more explicable in terms of the Russian elite's not being ready for freedom or political competition. We should not overstate the maturity of ordinary Russians or their ability to follow the rule of law; they are still politically inactive and seem incapable of coming together to force the regime to take their interests into account. The Russian public has no experience of civil associations, no experience of life in a country where the powers of the state are separated between the executive, legislature, and judiciary. The people of Russia are, however, increasingly ready to move toward European standards and norms. They already feel themselves to be Europeans. They increasingly long to be rid of a corrupt state that burdens them and to enjoy the personal well-being that people in the West enjoy. Because development has become globalized, and because Russia is now a reasonably economically developed country with a population reasonably educated and informed about the rest of the world, there is no call for it to repeat all those stages that Great Britain passed through on the path to liberal democracy since the era of Magna Carta. The further problem remains, however, of how to enable the people to recognize the link between their economic aspirations and freedom, between security, stability, and reform.

The Russian elite is trying desperately to keep society in a state of drowsy oblivion, both by playing on its subconscious, reactivating old myths, and by not allowing the demons of the past to die. It is the Russian elite that is incapable of performing in a context of political pluralism, which is the principal force keeping Russia in its current deadlock. The Russian ruling class can, indeed, be called elite only in a purely conventional sense. It is a mishmash of sundry groups (like Putin's St. Petersburg brigade) raised to the highest positions in the land through the workings of mere chance. Most of them lack more than managerial talent. They also lack (and this is more serious) the ability or desire to take into account the national interest. The main aims of the ruling class propelled into power as a result of the

collapse of the USSR are not difficult to guess: they aim to line their pockets, to control whatever property they have managed to get their hands on, to prevent the emergence of new faces inside their ranks (that is, people who might redistribute their property or undermine their positions), and to keep the public ignorant of where their real interests lie.

Unlike the Soviet elite, the new Russian political class has emergency landing sites in the West to which it can parachute with its families at the drop of a hat. The comprador elite cleverly disguises its commercial mediation in the sell-off of Russian resources using nationalist rhetoric. Having this Western escape hatch has two consequences: it may prevent the ruling class from attempting to cling to power by violent means, and it also bolsters its cynicism, general lack of commitment, and inability to understand and promote the national interests of the country.

The elite imposes its will on society not by force, as it used to, but by imitating, and thereby discrediting, freedom. "You live in a democratic state," the elite informs the public. "You have courts, a parliament, a multiparty system. What else do you want?" When, however, Russia's citizens see that all the institutions of the state are corrupt and that democracy appears to mean that the bureaucracy can do whatever it pleases, they are likely to question the need for democracy. When, under the guise of liberalism, technocrats who lack any sensitivity to social costs impose deregulatory decisions on them, the people wonder what the use of liberalism is and why they need it. To this day, the Yeltsin period, which the population remembers as a time of a widening gap between rich and poor and a dramatic fall in the general standard of living while the democratic band played on, evokes revulsion on the part of the public against democratic values. Those traditionally called liberals in the government caused anger and disgust by their ostentation and blatant disregard of the predicament of ordinary people, and this now automatically spills over to a rejection of those who still attempt to raise the banner of liberalism. Mikhail Khodor-

kovsky, while in jail with time to think over Russian developments, has rightly observed that the defeat of liberalism occurred also because people "could not stand the sight of liberals in thousand-dollar jackets" at a time when deprived families had nothing to clothe their children with. Still, not all liberals of the 1990s understood that truth.

Will not Russia's citizens at some point demand real freedom from their elite in the way the Ukrainians did, whose mentality and culture are close to that of Russians? And why are Ukrainians more willing to embrace competition in politics and the rule of law than Russians are? The answer can only be that the Ukrainian public does not lay claim to great-power status and that the great majority of Ukrainians are prepared to join the West, at some cost to their sovereignty. A substantial part of Russian society would also at some point be willing to jettison the myth of superpower status in return for prosperity and well-being. It is just not ready to do so for the time being. Russians continue to follow the elite, and the elite fears that repudiating great-power status would pull the rug out from under it. The elite would have to renounce its acts of global derring-do and create a normal country, although governing a normal country is something the political class today is clearly incapable of doing. In a free country, the present elite would certainly be thrown out. Maintaining a claim to great-power status is still one of the chief obstacles to Russia's emancipation. The political class continues to foster popular phobias and complexes, insisting that Russia is fated to glory and a special destiny. It busily tries to prevent the populace from thinking in less exalted categories and seeking a decent and dignified life for themselves.

That individuals who think of themselves as liberal democrats choose to be employed by an illiberal regime works to the advantage of bureaucratic authoritarianism. The failure of the Yeltsin generation of liberal democrats to form a united opposition to the regime, their ignoring (with the honorable exception of the Yabloko Party) of issues of equality and justice, also hinders Russia's transformation. In the Baltic states, Moldova,

and Ukraine, moving closer to the West was seen as a reaffirming of national identity, and the nationalism of these states facilitated an embracing of liberal democracy. In Russia, on the contrary, nationalism rejects the West and its ideologies. Since the collapse of the Soviet state in the 1990s, many people, including quite a few liberals, believe that Russia can survive only as a centralized state and a superpower. They are convinced that repudiating these principles will precipitate a new collapse, but now it will be the collapse of the Russian Federation. Russia's future trajectory largely depends on whether the liberals and democrats succeed in persuading the people that, although they oppose personalized power and great-power ambitions, they have no wish to see Russia implode but are merely striving to create a law-governed state that would act as a center of attraction for its neighbors. As long as the liberals and democrats are considered antinational and antipatriotic, they have no prospect of becoming the leading force in Russian politics.

Meanwhile, strengthening authoritarian trends in Russian political life have put Russian liberals and democrats in a painful dilemma, one seemingly without a solution: either to preserve the role of the systemic opposition and take part in public politics, including elections, or to shift to the role of radical, anti-systemic, and anti-regime opposition, without the hope of a role in public political life. The role of the systemic opposition includes the endorsement of the key principles of the current system, the rejection of any claim to real power, and a readiness to collaborate with the authorities. Those who choose the second option will have to face the inevitable threat of being pushed outside the political arena and of becoming the object of state harassment. Previous political ambivalence in Russia that included elements of pluralism and political struggle has gradually been replaced with the state monopoly, which means submission by all actors to the Kremlin's rules of the game. All political forces have to make a choice that will affect their future activity and make them either partners—and

elements of the regime—or opponents, with consequences that are already known.

During the first term of Putin's presidency, opposition to the regime still had, though in a form more limited than before, the opportunity to act within the system, that is, to be present in the parliament and to have some access to the national television channels and media. Now, only a tamed opposition, that is, the forces and political actors who are allowed to disagree with one another over trivia but who do not risk criticizing the regime, are allowed to remain. Ironically, the Communist Party has preserved its oppositional role, which proves that the ruling elite does not find communists to be a threat, and the Kremlin and the communists have found a *modus vivendi*. The situation with the communists can be defined as an anti-systemic factor working in the interests of the system—not the only paradox in the Russian reality. As in Yeltsin's time, the Kremlin needs the communists in the role of bogeymen, in order to look constructive. Communists are from time to time invited to the national television channels and even have permission to organize their rallies, consolidating the left electorate and preventing it from moving to more radical opposition. Meantime, liberals have been marginalized and are denied avenues of self-expression. The Kremlin's reaction to liberal opposition has been much more severe compared with the Kremlin's attitude to the Communist Party, which demonstrates that liberal democracy is the alternative that seriously worries the Kremlin.

At the end of 2006 and through 2007, fragmentation within the liberal-democratic movement continued without much assistance from the Kremlin. Some liberals and democrats (for instance the leaders of the Republican Party, Vladimir Ryzhkov and Vladimir Lysenko, who were denied registration) supported the Other Russia movement that had become a version, albeit weak, of the People's Front. The "old parties," the Union of Right Forces (SPS) and Yabloko, have decided to follow their own paths. This could have been expected in the case of SPS, which has been moving in the Kremlin orbit. The leader of

Yabloko, Grigory Yavlinsky, has distanced his party from the Other Russia movement in an attempt to preserve the role of a moderate and constructive opposition to the regime. It is a daunting task in a situation where political pluralism has been wiped away. Soon the Other Russia movement began to split, proving how difficult, if not impossible, it is for the opposition to unite when stagnation and passivity prevail in a society apprehensive of new turmoil. Russian democrats continue their effort to challenge the regime and its succession project by preparing to take part in the Duma elections and even presidential elections. By August 2007 Grigory Yavlinsky, Mikhail Kasianov, Viktor Gerashchenko (former head of the Russian Central Bank), and former Soviet dissident Vladimir Bukovsky announced that they would run for the presidency on the opposition platform. So far the opposition has failed to consolidate around one presidential candidate, which makes the whole opposition campaign a futile effort.

The Kremlin's crackdown on political pluralism and its tightening of the screws have narrowed the breathing space of the democrats. Moderates may still find opportunities for legal activity by distancing themselves from the radical opposition, which has been the Kremlin's chief target for harassment. However, moderates' participation in a rubber-stamp legislature cannot change the nature of the regime, and will turn into more decorative ornaments. Down the road, the moderate opposition may find itself without its electorate, which has begun to radicalize. Yabloko members in St. Petersburg already take part in Other Russia rallies—a painful Catch-22 situation for democratic opposition parties of the Yabloko type. To continue the political struggle by legitimate means in a continually shrinking legal space could end with their marginalization or worse: turning into an element of the system they have been fighting against. Adopting a more radical stance would force them to take to the streets, leaving them without the legal means to present their views. The parliamentary elections in December 2007 will demonstrate whether the regime can leave a niche for moderate

liberal opposition. This is an experiment that will also show how Russia could be democratized in the future. Will it be done through legal activities of the opposition in public institutions and its participation in elections, or through street protests if the authorities totally eradicate dissent from the political stage? To date, the system has moved in the latter direction, which leaves no scope for an independent moderate opposition.

Chapter 25

CAN THE WEST HELP THE RUSSIAN LIBERAL PROJECT?

What part the West has played or may yet play in the fate of Russia's liberal project is highly contentious. Assessments in both Russia and the West include confidence that the West's role in Russia's development has been overestimated, that it was not significant before and is negligible now. An opposite assessment is that the establishment of the current political regime in Russia would never have been possible without support and legitimization by the West. Ivan Krastev has been pretty tough on the Western impact, saying,

Managed democracy in Russia was justified as the best way to prevent a communist restoration. For this reason, it appealed not only to some Russian liberals but also to Western governments.... The establishment of managed democracy in Russia would never have been possible without the endorsement of the West.¹

Within Russia, the criticism of Western democracies and their policies toward Russia is increasing in all political factions, even among liberals. Liberals consider, with frustration, that the Western community has no interest in Russian reforms and suspect the West has struck a deal with the Kremlin in order to

pursue its security and energy interests. Representatives of statist, nationalist, and even moderate factions believe the West is constantly meddling, trying to subvert the independence of the Russian state and weaken it, viewing Russia as a potential competitor or enemy. Ultimately, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, different political forces in Russia, from the liberals and Westernizers to the populists and nationalists, have come together in disappointment, criticism, and even condemnation of the West. How much impact does the West really have in Russia, and how important is it to Russia's liberal transformation, if at all?

At the end of Vladimir Putin's presidency, the West has considerably less scope for influencing Russia's development than it had in the 1990s. Now marginal at best, the West needs to appreciate its limitations and be aware that its efforts may be counterproductive should it fail to understand Russian reality, what is possible in Russia today and what is not. There are a number of reasons why the "Western factor" has become less significant in Russia.

In its policy toward Russia, the West has always been torn between its desire for constructive relations with the Kremlin in order to achieve its economic and security goals, which require it to refrain from preaching to the Russian leadership, and attempts to influence Russia's democratic reorientation. To date, it has failed to strike a balance between those two goals, as reflected in the permanent zigzagging of its Russia policy. The problem of energy security obliges consumer countries (meaning primarily Western democracies) to humor to the supplier countries, most of which are far from democratic regimes. The West's desire to keep Russia as one of its dependable and responsible suppliers of hydrocarbons obliges Western governments, especially in Europe, to close their eyes to the "special features" of Russian democracy. Security and energy concerns, as well as fears of Russia's destabilization should it again begin to democratize, constrain Western attempts to defend its values in

relations with Russia and to remind the Kremlin of the standards Russia has subscribed to.

The domestic challenges faced by the Western democracies—immigration, problems relating to the coexistence of different cultures, the tension between economic efficiency and social welfare, and the stumbling of the European integration project—force the West to concentrate on its own problems. This focus leaves it less time and energy to assist the transformation of other states. It is particularly difficult to assist in the democratization of hybrid regimes, like Russia's, that have learned to construct façades and desperately resist efforts to influence their development from the outside. Here the West's efforts may even result in supporting hybrid regimes in their mimicry. These regimes have become skilled not only in defending themselves from "foreign interference in internal affairs" but in using the West in the interests of their stability and in their game of pretending and imitating.

In Russia, frightened by the "color revolutions," the authorities are trying by all the means at their disposal to block the Western factor. The Kremlin's propagandists are adept at discrediting the West's intentions toward Russia. Russian politicians, not least among them President Putin, have become highly accomplished at deflecting Western criticism with verbal gymnastics. Whenever Russia is criticized for corruption, lawlessness, the killing of journalists, brutality in Chechnya, or civil rights violations, the politicians find corresponding examples in Western practices, reminding us of the Enron saga, the corruption of Spanish mayors, the harassment of ethnic Russians living in Latvia and Estonia, the misdeeds of American soldiers in Iraq, the Guantánamo base and the Abu Ghraib prison, and failed efforts by the Bush administration to promote democracy in the Middle East. "In any case, *mafia* is not a Russian word," Putin once noted in response to criticism of Russia by the leaders of the European Parliament. The result of anti-Western and anti-American propaganda is that Russians form the impression that the West has no moral ground for telling

them how they should behave or how to construct a successful society. The Kremlin has become successful in provoking suspicion toward Western intentions and, sometimes, the behavior of Western politicians helps the Kremlin's efforts. The key Russian politicians reiterate: "The West does not like us. It constantly criticizes us because we are now strong and independent and will not allow it to order us around. We have to be on guard because their advice will return Russia back to a Yeltsin-type chaos." These arguments strike a chord with the Russian population.

The elite does its best, not without success, to inculcate the idea that Western assistance in building democracy and the work of Western nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) within Russia is aimed at subverting the state. The impression is that the Kremlin insiders sincerely believe this. The United States is the recipient of most of the accusations, and President Putin himself here takes the lead in blasting America. One may conclude that the Russian political regime has found fairly effective ways of deterring Western influence by first using imitation techniques and anti-Western propaganda. Next, it finds Western weaknesses and points to double standards in Western behavior, which often leaves the West at a loss as to how to respond. Third, it harasses Russian nongovernmental organizations and movements that receive Western assistance and pursue a liberal agenda. (In today's Russia, discrediting liberal democracy means discrediting the West, and vice versa.)

Now that the Kremlin has successfully nullified political pluralism and the opposition, its major priority is the insulation of its citizenry from Western influence. Russian and foreign NGOs have become the inevitable victims of the new campaign. In January 2006 President Putin signed a bill into law imposing tough control on local and foreign NGOs functioning in the country. Major efforts are directed against Western organizations and those Russian NGOs that accept foreign funds. The ruling class tries to close off Russian society not only from the promotion of Western democracy but also from any Western assistance.

In the 1990s Russia was eager to learn the principles of democracy and readily embraced various forms of Western assistance in solving its social, educational, environmental, and health care problems. Today, even Russian liberals feel uncomfortable about Western influence and the concept of “democracy promotion.” One has to admit that the inept way it has been implemented, primarily by its key architect, the United States, has helped the Russian authorities build their anti-Western and anti-American campaign. Thomas Carothers comments in this regard, “Democracy promotion has come to be seen as a code word for ‘regime change.’” Carothers is also right in saying that “the damage that the Bush administration has done to the global image of the United States as ‘a symbol of democracy and human rights by repeatedly violating the rule of law at home and abroad has weakened the legitimacy of the democracy-promotion cause.’”² Anyway, Western activity will be counterproductive if it is rhetorical, self-serving, and hypocritical. In Russia’s case, the authorities have succeeded in making independent civil and political forces, and in particular the recipients of Western assistance, Western stooges in the eyes of the population.

A simplistic understanding of democracy assistance, its clumsy promotion by Western donors, and the Kremlin’s suspicion that this assistance is a disguise for other purposes results not only in the ineffectiveness of the effort itself, it also endangers the liberal community targeted by this assistance. A recent example is the State Department’s report “Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2006,” which includes a long list of U.S. government activity in funding NGOs, promoting the rule of law, advocacy training for prosecutors and defense lawyers, and (among other things) promoting “free and fair elections.” The United States “continued to provide programming and technical support to Russian watchdog organizations [and] nonpartisan training for political parties,” says the report.³ While the Russian regime is engaged in a search for the enemy, this statement is the kiss of death for NGOs and liberal parties since any such assistance puts its recipients in a vulner-

able position. Moreover, any foreign assistance to political parties is forbidden by a new Russian electoral law.

Recent developments in Russia and the nature of its relations with the West have demonstrated that the previous model for the Western–Russian partnership, based on the premise of Russia’s transformation and integration into the West, has proved to be premature. A new formula is needed for the relationship that would include a more subtle Western approach to Russian transformation. Building this new formula forces both sides to deliberate on some crucial questions. Does the West still want Russia to be part of its civilization? Does Russia want to pursue that goal? Or are both sides moving toward an entirely different model of the relationship, one that will exclude Western influence on Russia’s development and in which the West will agree to be excluded?

The search for a new balance of values and interests in the relations between Russia and the West continues. The new leaders coming to power in Russia, major European countries, and the United States will have to deal with the new Russian challenge. The leaders that presided over the period of the Soviet Union’s collapse, including Mikhail Gorbachev, Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Margaret Thatcher, and the next political generation that came to the fore when Russia and the new states were dealing with the painful issues of their state building (I have in mind Boris Yeltsin and Bill Clinton) succeeded in coping with the security agenda. They also left hope for Russia’s integration into the Western world. The generation of leaders that is leaving today, or has recently left the political scene—Tony Blair, George W. Bush, Jacques Chirac, Vladimir Putin, and Gerhard Schröder—have undermined the hope that Russia will be brought into the Western orbit. There have been serious objective reasons for their failure to integrate Russia into the West, having to do first of all with the complexities of Russia’s transformation. Yet those leaders all bear a share of responsibility for Russia’s and the West’s moving apart.

Is the West ready for a new project of engaging Russia, this time more cautiously and with advance planning? The debate in the West between the two schools of thought, realist and idealist, on whether to help Russia with its transformation or pursue instead only geopolitical interests in the relationship, has intensified. Western realists have persuasive motives for withdrawing their active support for Russia's transformation. Indeed, the political climate in Russia constrains Western efforts to influence Russian reforms and disallows ambitious assistance to foster democracy. Why try to help if Russia has decided to follow its own "special path"? Why try to preach democracy to a society that gives its authoritarian leader massive support? Besides, any hint of promoting democracy might hamper the realization of Western strategic interests with Russia. Let the Russians sort out their problems before the West begins a new attempt to support their reforms, realists say. In a discussion on Russia, organized by *American Interest*, Hugh Ragsdale and Paul Stepan argued,

What are the U.S. interests in Russia? They are simple and unmistakable and two in particular are critical: cooperation on nuclear proliferation and the monitoring and suppression of terrorism.... When the U.S. government is not attacking Russian political practice, it is eagerly soliciting its assistance in issues beyond the easy reach of U.S. strength.... Russians are going to do government [in] their own way. It is beyond America's capacity to do much about it, except to poison their regard for the U.S. and its interests in the attempt.³

Russian pragmatists among analysts and politicians frustrated with the chill in relations are trying to find ways to reengage Russia and the West, unequivocally supporting the approach of "no more democracy preaching" and a shift to an interest-based policy.

The problem is that to date the realism that dominated the policies of key Western powers toward Russia did not help the West and Russia to realize mutually acceptable common interests and did not prevent their relationship from deteriorating. The proponents of the new version of realism fail to notice the causality between, on the one hand, the way Russia is organized and, on the other, the way it reacts to the West. The divergences between Russia and the West would not vanish if the West were to stop expressing concerns over Russia's normative trajectory. They may become even more pronounced. Recent experience has proved that the dichotomy between standards and interests is artificial since interests in the end are rooted in values. That is why there is no guarantee that the Kremlin would be ready to be a predictable partner of the West and even cooperate with the West when it views the West as an alien civilization built on different standards. All this means is that the West must take a keener interest in Russia's transformation, not for philanthropic reasons but for the sake of its strategic interests and its own well-being. Russian pragmatists who preach a need to return to *realpolitik* and advise the West to accept Russia as it is in fact not only reject Russia's liberal trajectory, but by doing so, they undermine any chance of building a solid basis for the relationship. Moreover, sooner or later they will be forced to become engaged in anti-Western rhetoric simply because one cannot be friendly with the West while supporting "Russia as it is."

I support Joseph S. Nye, who argues:

If the West were to turn its back on Russia, isolation would reinforce the xenophobic and statist tendencies present in Russian political culture and make the liberal course more difficult. A better approach would be to look to the long run, use the soft power of attraction, expand exchanges and contacts with Russia's new generation, support its participation in the WTO and other market institutions, and address deficiencies with specific criticism rather than general harangues or isolation.⁴

The realists, however, are right to express their concerns as to what should be the new engagement formula and how to implement it. The devil is always in the details.

Indeed, the West continues to influence Russia by its very existence. Russia formulates its own policies by reacting to the West, arguing with it, and rejecting or copying it. To a considerable extent it is thanks to the influence of the West (primarily Europe) that Russia has numerous nongovernmental organizations; an ombudsman for human rights; trial by jury; and community service as an alternative to army service. Russians appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg when they cannot obtain justice in Russia. In 2005, Russians lodged a record 8,500 complaints against the Russian state, or 20.8 percent of all the complaints filed.

The question is, should the West quietly wait for Russia to be ready for its new democratic revolution? Such tactics would mean preserving the status quo, as some Western politicians and pundits exasperated with revisionist Russia would suggest. Or should it be an active strategy that will look ahead with the goal of integrating Russia in the future through a gradual transformation, which could be more protracted than many of us believed in the 1990s? The West at the moment has no answer to these questions. Meantime, the recent emergence of a resurgent and angry Russia is a warning for the West that an unreformed Russia cannot be friendly toward the West.

Western leaders and proponents of a wait-and-see tactic for Russia have to understand that the lack of a common Western strategy for Russia and support of the status quo in Russia will inevitably end with Russia becoming more alienated from the Euro-Atlantic community. Given all the constraints, the West can create an environment conducive to Russian reforms. Three imperatives, it seems, are crucial here: *understanding*, *strategy*, and *engagement*. Russians interested in moving toward the West expect it to understand the contradictory nature of Russia's evolution, as well as its obstacles and potential. Without understanding of Russian dilemmas and choices, the West will

continue to be wrongfooted by this restive country, something that has happened more than once in the past decade. Moreover, the West will continue to be stunned by Russian developments. As George Soros has candidly admitted, "Russia seems to be emerging as a new kind of player on the international scene.... Although I follow developments in Russia fairly closely, I have been taken unawares. In this respect I am no different from the rest of the world."⁵

Russians hoping for Russia's transformation would expect the West to furnish a coherent and subtle strategy for dealing with the Kremlin leadership, the political class, and society. How the concept of reengaging with Russia, with the goal of its future integration, is defined—as selective engagement, pragmatic engagement, cooperation, or dialogue—does not matter. More important is that it should assure the Russian population, now disenchanted with the West, that the West has high stakes in and a serious commitment to its relations with Russia. In addition, the West should assure Russians that it is interested in Russia's successful reforms and its joining the Western community. Engagement with Russia should include cooperation with it in those areas where their interests overlap: in counterproliferation, combating international terrorism, energy security, and climate change. Further, true engagement presupposes that the two sides will learn to avoid the zero-sum game that allows the Russian elite to feel confident, and the Western establishment (or some circles) to see this zero-sum game as an adequate response to Russia's newly acquired cockiness.

The West has tools for influencing Russian perceptions and attitudes that it is not using, or using rarely or badly. Russia is a member of such Western clubs as NATO, the G8, the Council of Europe, and the Parliamentary Assembly. Russian leaders—Gorbachev, Yeltsin, and Putin—have signed a series of documents committing Russia to strengthening the rule of law, civil society, respect for human rights, freedom-of-the-press guarantees, and the independence of the judiciary. Today the West has the opportunity to remind Moscow about the obligations it

undertook when joining those clubs and signing those documents. On those occasions when Western leaders have had to remind the Kremlin of its obligations, their insistence has yielded results. Under pressure from its G8 partners (primarily the United States), Russian authorities jettisoned a harsher version of the law on nongovernmental organizations.

Only too frequently, however, Western leaders try not to upset the Kremlin by raising contentious matters in private talks with Russian leaders. There has hardly been any attempt by Western leaders to make furtherance of the economic interests of the Russian elite in the West conditional on a commitment by the Kremlin to follow the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, or the principles of the Council of Europe. The West often takes the easiest black-and-white approach, either trying to put pressure on the Kremlin or becoming excessively amiable toward it (with the second approach predominating). Both approaches indirectly contribute to strengthening Russian authoritarianism, which has learned to exploit the West and its actions in the interests of self-preservation.

If the Western community wishes to show greater initiative in encouraging Russia's liberal project, it will have to rethink one or two customary approaches to promoting democracy. One would be an attempt to assist in the formation of independent institutions (parties, trade unions, and a parliament), the organization of elections, or the formation of youth movements like those that were prime movers in the revolutions in Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine. The Moscow establishment has succeeded in erecting insurmountable barriers to such Western activity in Russia, which is regarded as interference in its internal affairs, while the acceptance of such aid by Russians is regarded as anti-state activity. For the same reason, Western observers will find it far more difficult, if not impossible, to monitor Russian elections effectively in the future. In terms of "bridge building," the West's first priority today should be to prevent Russian society from being cut off from the outside world and to counter any further growth of anti-Westernism.

Several key tools in this context may be useful: *openness, information, support of NGOs, business, social projects, and success stories*. In terms of openness, the West needs to move beyond a state-to-state dialogue that both Russian and Western elites pursue, often without much profit. Instead it needs to facilitate contacts between Russian society and Western society. Thus far, the Western leaders (apparently tired of the Russian puzzle) have lost interest in bringing together stakeholders in both Russia and the West interested in cultivating the relationship. Particularly important are student and professional exchanges and the easing of the visa regime between Russia and Western countries. Undoubtedly, the opposite is currently happening. Western broadcasting in Russia needs to be expanded; instead, it has been reduced. Efforts to assist Russian civil society need to continue but new forms of this assistance should be discussed that will not make NGOs aliens in Russian society. Allowing Russian business to enter Western markets, and minimizing the barriers to those Russian exports that are competitive in the global market, would be an important instrument of engagement and keeping Russia more open.

Social projects in Russia that would help to improve the West's image in the eyes of the Russian population might be an effective way of implementing a new engagement policy (I have in mind assistance in fighting lethal diseases, solving ecological problems, and cooperation in educational projects). It is also important to help create an example of successful transformation that would help Russians to discard their belief that they are genuinely unsuited to democracy and convince Russian society that it can be reformed (just as Poland's transformation and integration into Europe has persuaded Ukrainians that they can follow suit). The success stories of Ukraine and Belarus, two nations culturally and historically close to Russia, could provide a high-profile argument in favor of freedom and democracy for ordinary Russians.

Finally, the West should at all costs avoid isolating Russia, even if Moscow does everything it can to marginalize itself. It is

a test for the Western community to provide engagement with Russian society without support of its bureaucratic–authoritarian regime.

Admittedly, we have to recognize that the logic of the Russian system may bring an increasing closing off of society from the outside world, which will reduce all opportunities for outside influence. Even so, the West may still be able to aid the Russian liberal project indirectly by practicing what it preaches. If the West renounces its dual standards, observes its own ideals, provides for the welfare of the Western community, and demonstrates to Russian society a genuine interest in its successful revival, it will enhance the attractiveness of the liberal alternative for Russia.

Chapter 26

HOW TO STOP SUICIDAL STATECRAFT

The world's need for energy supplies, the force of inertia, the efforts of the Russian elite to discredit democracy, the passivity of society, and the lack of a strong liberal opposition—all serve to prolong Russia's drifting in the doldrums of history. Sooner or later, however, it will be impossible for Russia to ignore the question of how long it can continue to exist simultaneously in the past and the future, to move backward and forward at the same time, imitating development and reforms while trying to preserve the status quo. An important factor continues to make it especially difficult to escape from this impasse. That factor is war and its repercussions. I will return to the war in Chechnya: Yeltsin's war accelerated the demise of Russia's reforms. Putin's war in Chechnya not only squeezed him into the presidency but also continues to legitimize his personalized power. Moreover, this was a new kind of war—against the internal and external enemy—which has implications for Russia's development that at the moment are difficult to grasp. In the wake of the 2004 tragedy in Beslan, Putin defined the situation with a single word: "war." He thereby provided himself with the justification for further moves to centralize power. Officially, the war in Chechnya was declared over. Yet it remains unclear whether it has really ended, or whether it might restart,

this time in other Northern Caucasus republics, or what its consequences will be for Russia, its understanding of its mission, its nature, and its territorial integrity. In any case, the war's impact on Russian domestic politics may facilitate the establishment of a new authoritarian regime after Putin is gone.

Two Chechen wars resulted in the degeneration of the troops who have fought in Chechnya, a consolidation of corruption of authorities and institutions involved in the North Caucasus, an outburst of Russian nationalism and Islamic radicalism; and, finally, they have become one of the reasons behind the failure of Russian reforms. Not a single state has ever succeeded in pursuing reforms while fighting a civil war. That is what the two Chechen wars have brought Russia—simultaneously facilitating the centralization of power and conjuring up conflicts the regime cannot resolve. For Russia to emerge from the past, a line needs to be drawn through its militaristic paradigm of development and attempts to use war for the regime's purposes. This will also require a reevaluation of the wars Yeltsin and Putin waged in the North Caucasus and a search for a way to overcome their effects on the minds of Russians.

The war in Vietnam had a tremendous impact on an entire generation of Americans, who eventually coped with the trauma by reflecting it in art. Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* was one of the means by which America found closure. In Russia the war in Chechnya continues to influence domestic developments and the mentality of the Russian people. Society tries not to think about it, represses it, tries to forget it, and deludes itself that the problem of Chechnya does not affect it and never affected it. The country refuses to face up to the surreptitious and destructive influence those two wars continually have on the way people feel, think, and behave, not only in the Northern Caucasus or neighboring Russian regions, but in the whole of Russia. Until society is prepared to reassess the war in the Caucasus, the war cannot end, either in people's minds or in reality. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of people—soldiers and civilians—have been subjected to the savagery of

two Chechen campaigns that became civil wars, coloring life in Russia with their tragedy. The ongoing Chechen syndrome is reflected in the fact that the public cannot decide whether Russian servicemen should be put on trial for murdering Chechen civilians. Time and time again, the Russian courts acquit war criminals whom society sees as heroes, further consolidating the cult of lawlessness and brutality in the country. Putting off the need to find closure for the wars in Chechnya by rethinking their consequences and solving the problems of the Northern Caucasus leaves Russia unable to put an end to its militaristic paradigm, to recognize the value of human life, or to face its responsibility for the tragedies suffered by other peoples because of the actions of the Russian state. Without this, it will be impossible for Russia to move forward to a *post-post-Soviet future*.

The future of the present Russian experiment of adapting democratic means to suit the needs of authoritarianism is obvious—it has none. Describing policy during the presidency of George W. Bush, Zbigniew Brzezinski uses the expression “suicidal statecraft,” coined by Arnold Toynbee to define the process whereby a state following a militarist course undermines itself:¹ “For America, suicidal statecraft will end with a change of leadership and a change of policy. In the case of Russia, suicidal statecraft and its repudiation will be an unpredictable process that may convulse not only Russia, but the post-Soviet territories.”

Does this mean that Russia, stuck at a fork in the road, will be unable to emerge from its stagnation of many long years, or that it is doomed to some catastrophic scenario? Current trends give no grounds for optimism. The ruling class and Russian society itself are drifting downstream with no thought of where the drift will take them. Mutually incompatible trends within the system and society itself, combined with a historical weariness after failed revolutions and numerous weaknesses disguised by demonstrations of strength (which are often imitations of strength or strength that soon turns into a weak-

ness), make it difficult to generate the energy needed to change things. The elite has not forgotten the Gorbachev period, which it sees as proof that if you weaken control over society, events will spiral out of control and it may have to face the collapse of the Russian Federation. One can hardly expect a liberal-democratic upsurge in the context of stagnation and mass disenchantment with reforms. Such an upsurge can only be triggered by a crisis or by the imminent threat of one. Sometimes, looking at the state of the country, it seems that a crisis would be preferable to hopeless, terminal decay. There is no guarantee, however, that a crisis in Russia will usher in a golden age of freedom. The elite may deal with a crisis by merely changing rhetoric, policies, or personalities in the Kremlin, while the old system continues unchanged, as happened in 1991, 1993, 1998, and 2000. It may be that before Russia has another opportunity to turn to liberal democracy, it will have to free itself not only of illusions about the beneficence of mild authoritarianism but also from the temptation to try to resolve its problems with a nationalistic, totalitarian regime. Russian nationalists dreaming about a real “iron hand” have good reason to support Putin’s regime today. They hope it will facilitate their coming to power. Totalitarianism in Russia cannot be sustained in the long term first of all because the elite is afraid to use repression on a mass scale. But it may attempt to turn to totalitarian mechanisms to defend its position in a moment of crisis. Everything depends on when the next crisis, which will demonstrate the unviability of the system, occurs, what sort of condition Russia is in at the time, and the state of mind of its political class and its society.

It remains unclear what effect the remaining elements of Russia’s hybrid nature will have on its future development. The democratization of similar regimes in Mexico, Serbia, and Ukraine has shown that hybrids, because they afford some level of freedom, can raise the population’s aspirations for a real democracy. So far, however, Russia has been out of luck; its underdeveloped democratic institutions have produced disaf-

fection and only encouraged the population to seek to survive under the strong, personalized regime.

Even with these anxieties, complexes, and constraints, the desire to see Russia reborn as a liberal state is still alive. A significant section of the population recognizes that there is an impasse and ponders what needs to be done to move forward along liberal lines. In Russia there are far more people who want to live in freedom than one might suppose. It is true that when Russians are asked about their priorities, they reply that the most important ones are security, stability, and their standard of living. In 2006 75 percent regarded these as most important, while only 13 percent mentioned democracy. However, only 12 percent of these respondents agreed that the interests of the state are more important than those of the individual. Fifteen percent considered that the rights of individuals can be sacrificed to those of the state; 44 percent believed that people should fight for their rights; and 21 percent said that the interests of the individual are more important than those of the state. This was a breakthrough in the thinking of a people who for centuries have been brought up to revere the state and their leader.

Yet, we have to acknowledge a growing split in people’s thinking in recent years. People support the idea of a “special path” for Russia while wanting to see it move closer to the West. They dislike the state but also want it to help them; they demand the expulsion from Russia of its “non-native” population but want other states to become part of Russia. They want order and freedom, and democracy and strong leadership, but cannot find a proper balance. Politics and its major elements and tools (such as political parties, parliament, the judiciary, the media, and opposition) have been intentionally and completely discredited. In the eyes of the population, this leaves the presidency as the only viable political institution. Putin and Putin’s epoch have returned Russia to the key elements of the old matrix, and his successor will have to deal with that legacy.

In spring 2007, 64 percent of Russian respondents said that they trusted the president; 42 percent trusted the church; 31,

the army; 27, the media; 24, the security services; 19, the government, 17, the judiciary, 16, prosecutors, 13, parliament, and 7, political parties. This is a devastating verdict of society on current Russian politics and a reflection of its deep dissatisfaction with existing political institutions. This does not mean that the same people do not want these institutions to be active and effective—after the brutal dispersal of the dissenters' marches, around 60 percent of respondents said that they believe that the opposition has the right to express its views. Thus, at the end of Putin's political cycle, we note increased social disenchantment with politics, fear of change, and a longing for the status quo and stability. At the same time, in the bleak picture the polls paint of the popular mood, one can see glimmers of hope. Amid a statist and nationalist outburst, according to the pro-Kremlin VTSIOM survey center, 47 percent of respondents said that Russia should not fight for superpower status (34 percent said it should). Asked what will guarantee the well-being of Russia, only 29 percent mentioned presidential "verticality," that is, top-down governance; 43 percent chose the "strengthening of civil rights" (12 percent chose neither, and 18 percent held no view).² According to another poll done by the Levada Center, in July 2007 85 percent of respondents approved of Vladimir Putin's performance as president (14 percent disapproved). At the same time, 41 percent were satisfied with the situation and 56 percent of respondents were dissatisfied.³ That means that those who approve of the activity of personalized power disapprove of the reality this power has created.

The regime is deliberately trying to keep the minds of the public in a schizophrenic state, obstructing the formation of a civil culture and legal mentality. If the demand for a "special path" and an "iron hand" strengthens in Russia, it will not be because of the inability of Russians to live in a democratic and free society, but because they have been deliberately disoriented and trapped by fears, phobias, and insecurity intentionally provoked by the ruling elite. They have blindly followed a corrupt

and immoral Russian political establishment that has offered them a false semblance of a solution.

For now, however, Russia's main problem is that the potential instigators of a new democratization are divided. What needs to happen for them to gain sufficient strength to come together to oppose the existing rot? A grassroots protest? Economic collapse? A technological disaster? Given that the forces of liberal democracy are weak, a great deal depends on how the pragmatists within the ruling elite behave, whether they recognize that retaining a lawless state is not only ruinous for the country but also provides them with no safeguards for their own future. Who specifically are likely to be the prime movers of a new transformation: representatives of business, the pragmatists within the federal authorities, a new generation of liberals, regional elites, the media community, or the younger generation of educated people? This remains unclear. It seems likely that a spearhead battalion will be formed from members of all these groups, and so far there is no way to predict who exactly will become its driving force.

There are signs that a new environment is gradually forming within Russian society and that conditions are ripening for a renewed impulse toward systemic change. The simple fact that society has become urbanized has forced a break with archaic political stereotypes. Business has succeeded in surviving and creating fairly efficient conditions for production. Its dynamism has come up against the constraints of a corrupted state not subject to the rule of law. The population would like to live the way Europeans do.

Finally, the younger generation is able to escape from the pressures of the state into its own world of Internet associations and is developing its own subculture. Millions of young people participate in blog sites and post their diaries on the Internet. In 2006, 1.2 million Russians subscribed to *LiveJournal*, created by Brad Fitzpatrick, and Soup, a Russian Internet company, is expected to have 4.1 million Russian subscribers by 2008. This phenomenon is growing exponentially and is producing a

social group that the regime cannot control. These young people are not interested in democracy today, but they may start taking an interest if their personal freedoms are threatened. They may then demand freedom for society in general. For the potential initiators of a social breakthrough to make their appearance, to become aware of the need to organize, and to see that what is needed is not merely a change of political personalities but a reform of the regime, Russia needs a radical change in public opinion. There has to be a recognition that society's problems can be addressed only by adopting new standards. This is how the Ukrainians in 2004 came to fundamentally reform their government. As events there showed, that is when people begin to adapt and get used to new values and principles, a process that may provoke disappointments. But those already are a different type of disappointment.

Chapter 27

PARADOXES AND HOPES

Russia's evolution since 1991 has sometimes seemed chaotic and devoid of logic, but there are patterns, often paradoxical, where positive developments have occurred as a consequence of negative developments, and vice versa, when one barrier has been successfully eliminated and simultaneously another one has been strengthened or produced. The results of actions often can be contrary to those intended. Complexity, ambiguity and the contradictory nature of the Russian landscape result not only from the *multidimensionality* of its transformational process, which is historically unprecedented, but also from the fact that Russia is stuck, pretending and believing that it is moving. This creates appearances that are deceptive, reality that is confusing, and tensions that cannot be resolved without producing another set of tensions. Let us add to that personal factors—arrogance, incompetence, ignorance, the self-aggrandizing habits and vested interests of the ruling elite, coupled with passivity and apathy of a people totally worn out by the 1990s, dreaming of an unchangeable status quo and afraid of more turmoil.

I will single out several "transition traps," but the list of multiple barriers—structural and situational—Russia has encountered on the path to democracy and civil society, and of ironic

twists of history and reality that produced unexpected outcomes, could be extended.

- *Success Can Be Detrimental.* The stalling of democratic reforms is, to some extent, a result of the economic success and mild authoritarianism of the regime. This makes part of society believe it can be moderately prosperous and successful without liberal democracy.
- *The Uncertainty of Certainty.* The Russian political elite has cracked down on political pluralism and competition in its search for certainty. The result is that the certainties are now less fixed. Neither Putin nor Russia can know what will happen after 2008. And Putin's successor will hardly know how to deal with Putin's legacy, which is a more important unknown than the name of the successor.
- *The Instability of Stability.* The more the elite strengthens stability by using an obsolete model of the overcentralized state, the more it undermines it. Removing opportunities for expressing criticism within the framework of official institutions forces the opposition into the streets, turning criticism into destructive protest and rendering stability brittle.
- *The Impotence of Omnipotence.* This paradox, formulated by Guillermo O'Donnell in reference to Latin American countries, operates in Russia too. The concentration of all the powers of the state in a single pair of hands inevitably weakens the leader and makes him a hostage of his entourage, even if he succeeds in creating the impression of a strongman.
- *Digging One's Own Grave.* By eliminating competition and political pluralism, and by preventing discussion of systemic alternatives, the ruling class creates a situation where positive change will be needed to forcefully remove the current ruling elite from power.

- *The Dilemma of the Captive Mind.* This dilemma was formulated by Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka and deals with the specific personality syndrome of "homo sovieticus." The components of this syndrome include: passivity, avoidance of responsibility, conformism and opportunism, helplessness, "parasitic innovativeness," primitive egalitarianism, and passionless envy. Meanwhile, the market and democracy require the opposite: activity and innovation, responsibility, etc. The Russian system perpetuates the "homo sovieticus" syndrome.

This is not an exhaustive list, and new Catch-22s are constantly arising. Perhaps the greatest challenge for transforming Russia will be the need for its leadership to start the new reforms, of which the most radical will be dividing state power among independent institutions. Will a new leader be prepared to embark on political self-castration and hand over some of his powers to other institutions? This is Russia's metaproblem for which no solution was found under Yeltsin and Putin.

A number of laws govern the Russian postcommunist system. The most fundamental is the *law of failure*. When a liberal opposition is not ready to take power, society may have to pursue a false avenue before recognizing that it leads to a dead end. Only after hitting a wall does it start looking for another way out of its predicament. A leader has to fail spectacularly to demonstrate that the trajectory taken was wrong. Gorbachev's failure to reform the USSR showed that it could not be reformed. Yeltsin's attempt to create a functioning capitalism with the aid of technocrats and oligarchs demonstrated the limits of that form of capitalism. Putin's destiny may be to confirm that Russia cannot be modernized from above, in which case his success as an authoritarian modernizer will only delay Russia's finding the road to genuine democracy and an effective market economy. So if by his own limited lights Putin succeeds, he fails; and if he fails, he succeeds. One could expect that Putin's failure to pursue modernization should demonstrate to Russia that success-

ful czarism is a twenty-first century oxymoron and should bring the liberal transformation of Russia forward. So far there are no signs that it is going to happen. At the moment, in the people's eyes and in the eyes of the West, Vladimir Putin is not a failure. He has succeeded in skillfully replacing the modernization agenda with a search for stability. The price of oil has helped him to do the trick. Yet, the future will inevitably help to clarify matters and we will see the difference between failure and success.

I have already mentioned the *law of unintended consequences* and how it works in Russia. In the case of succession, this law means that the regime, trying to ensure self-perpetuation, creates a situation where the successor has to consolidate his power by repudiating his predecessor and his legacy.

Russia has to conceptualize the problems that arise as it climbs out of the past and embarks on its journey toward the kind of open society Karl Popper wrote about. The Russian public has yet to decide how much freedom and pluralism it is ready for, as nationalistic complexes remain inflamed and populist moods are on the rise. How can a lawless state be restructured without plunging Russia back into chaos? This dilemma reflects the eternal quandary of Russian reformers, which has often caused them to stop halfway or to turn back.

In the future, there would seem to be *three* ways for Russia to go: the present stagnation may continue; there may be a systemic crisis; or there may be a breakthrough to liberal democracy. For now, Russia continues to stagnate. Some optimists believe this scenario will push Russia toward liberal reforms. Stagnation, however, cannot lead to reform, it never did. It is more likely that it will end either in a crisis and an attempt to resolve it through repressive authoritarianism, or it will end with decay without a chance for Russia to get on its feet. Several years ago I thought that an avalanche-like collapse, unexpected ruin, disintegration—all these frightening and theatrical options are not for Russia. Today I am more pessimistic, watching how Russia is squandering the chance created by the oil bonanza to

modernize itself. Failure to do this in the next ten to fifteen years would mean that we have to consider the threat of a state collapse and Russia's disintegration. If this were to happen, the world will likely be appalled by the catastrophe and its global repercussions. Even if the worst could be avoided, stagnation is not much better—that would mean the slow spreading of rot, which might not always be visible but in the end would lead to the disintegration of the people's will, of the Russian spirit of adventure and of political and intellectual courage, and it would mean muddling through for decades. This is the price of stabilizing the current Russian reality and the price of squandering the opportunity.

What matters most for Russian society and the elite is to put an end to the stagnation and to find the means of bringing about the liberal transformation of Russia, in its present geographical configuration, before its relapse into old habits becomes irreversible and it reaches the point of no return. Each additional year that stagnation continues, however, reduces the probability of a liberal-democratic modernization. The opportunity is still there, but for how much longer will the window remain open—five, seven, ten years?

If Russia should try once more to realize its liberal project, it will face new issues. Russia is unlikely to be able to transform its enormous territory without the cooperation and assistance of the Western democracies, primarily in developing Siberia and the Far East, and perhaps also in modernizing the North Caucasus. Russia will need to abandon its stubborn aspiration to self-sufficiency and its pathological sensitivity over its sovereignty, when it is in any case increasingly dependent on the consumers of Russian natural resources. Inviting foreigners to resolve managerial and economic tasks is nothing new for Russia, but for the Western democracies to be willing to be included in a new Russian project, they will have to be persuaded that Russia is really embarking on the creation of a law-governed state. Moreover, Western cooperation is unlikely to be unconditionally acceptable to Russia. The West will need to bear

in mind just how difficult completing joint initiatives on the territory of Eurasia may prove, and how painful it will be for the Russian elite to maintain its position while Russia is becoming integrated into the Western world. If Western politicians indulge in displays of petty egoism or fail to recognize the magnitude of the challenge, they may send Russia back in the direction of a restoration. There is no need for Russia to become a full member of such organizations as NATO, the EU, and other Western forums in order to become part of the community of liberal democracies. Tailor-made forms of association and partnership may ease Russia's integration into European civilization.

The West should not expect a liberal Russia to prove an easy and agreeable partner, or to manifest much gratitude. Shared values do not necessarily lead to shared national interests or to full unanimity on how the world should be ordered and governed. This fact has been amply demonstrated by the frictions between Europe and the United States during the two terms of the Bush administration, with an idiosyncratic perspective of the world perpetually articulated by France. It is not impossible, indeed it is probable, that post-post-Soviet Russia will experience tension and disagreements with its Western partners. Neither is there any doubt that in times of trial Russia will stand with the West, if only because Russian society is concerned about the same things that threaten the West. These are primarily extremist radical Islam and nuclear proliferation, but also include the consequences of China's transformation into another superpower. Yet, there may come a time when we see democratic Russia allied with the West not on the basis of a war against common dangers, but on the basis of shared values.

Russia continues to drift, but the moment will surely come when the inability of bureaucratic authoritarianism to modernize the country and its failure to continue imitating stability and progress will become clear to Russians. Will the Russian political class have the courage to change the rules it plays by and move toward a state governed in accordance with the rule of law before it loses ground? Will it instead seek its salvation

in an aggressive autocracy, and will the populace go along with that? This will be a test of whether Russia is capable of recognizing that it cannot build a successful state until it abandons its old system. Will it find the strength for a renaissance as a liberal democracy and finally bring another chapter of its dramatic history to a close? Soon we will know the answer to this question. If Russia finds the courage to start anew, this historic endeavor will affect the entire global order. God grant that this time Russia's attempt to break through to the future will be a success.