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Russia: A Problematic Partner?

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Introduction

On 7 August 2008, Georgian military forces moved into South Ossetia, determined to stop cross-border shelling by South Ossetian separatists and retake the breakaway region by force. The same day, Russian forces poured across the border to reinforce their modest peacekeeping force and stop what Moscow described as genocide being committed by the Georgians. Russian naval forces landed troops in Abkhazia, which also rejects Georgian authority, and opened a second front there. Georgian forces soon retreated in disarray.

Russian air forces bombed Georgian military bases throughout the country. Ground forces occupied both breakaway regions and advanced several miles into previously undisputed Georgian territory. Although European leaders eventually brokered a ceasefire between the two nations, the outcome was clear—after ten days of fighting, the Georgians were soundly defeated and the Russians merely chose not to continue the fight. They withdrew back into South Ossetia and Abkhazia and recognized both as independent nations. The precise sequence of events is still in dispute, as is the ultimate responsibility for the short war. One verdict came swiftly, however, and was echoed in headlines around the world: Russia is back.

Decline

Following the collapse of Communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia experienced a decade of economic and political volatility. President Boris Yeltsin faced down an attempted coup and clashed violently with parliament. The transition from a command economy to a market economy proved difficult and painful, as state-owned enterprises were auctioned off to a newly formed economic elite. As the decade wore on, Yeltsin's leadership waned and the country drifted. Bereft of the lavish spending of Soviet times, the military decayed. The navy rusted at its docks, the air force no longer flew and the army could barely feed its soldiers. Draft dodging was rampant. Even the elite strategic rocket forces were reduced to seeking assistance from the United States to secure their nuclear weapons.

On the international stage, Russia ceased to be a significant player. Soviet aid dried up, and military advisors went home. No longer feeling threatened, NATO countries cut military spending. Former members of the Warsaw Pact lined up for membership in NATO and the European Union. Russian efforts to retain influence over the other former Soviet Republics were ineffective. Indeed, Russia could scarcely control its own territory: after two years of trying to crush a separatist movement in the tiny border province of Chechnya, Moscow granted them autonomy in 1996. As the 20th century drew to a close, Russia was a decaying remnant of a once-great empire.

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Resurgence

In August 1999, Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer and low-profile political operator, as the fifth prime minister in 18 months. Four months later, Yeltsin resigned the presidency and appointed Putin as acting president. The resignation triggered an early election in which Putin, with the advantage of incumbency, coasted to an easy victory. As Russians and international observers pondered this little-known figure, Putin moved quickly to put Russia back on track. He rejected international assistance in the sinking of the submarine *Kursk*, dealt forcefully with Chechen separatists during the Beslan hostage crisis and proposed major judicial and military reforms. Exports of oil and natural gas reinvigorated the economy and state finances. A 2003 Defense Ministry White Paper advocated that nuclear weapons be used for more than just deterrence.¹ Putin projected an image of strength, activity and national pride. It was a sharp break with the drift of the Yeltsin years, and it was initially welcomed by the Russian public; Putin's approval ratings have often exceeded 80 percent. Out of the chaos of Russia's political factions, a new party, United Russia, has coalesced around support for the president.

However, Putin was not the democrat that his rhetoric seemed to suggest. He all but abolished regional government, persecuted wealthy businessmen who opposed him and shuttered media outlets that criticized him. He installed his own associates (many with similarly shadowy backgrounds) in positions of power in the Kremlin and state-owned enterprises. Putin's poll numbers have not fallen and he has continued to win elections handily; but the populace no longer seems enthused by him. Rather, they seem resigned to his authoritarian rule, willing to trade some freedoms in exchange for a measure of stability and prosperity. His transition from the presidency back to the premiership in 2008 seems to have had little effect besides confirming his hold on power. Rhetoric that initially seemed merely patriotic now seems chauvinistically nationalist. Putin's Russia has stepped back onto the international stage, wielding access to energy and nuclear weapons as sticks. For a time, it seemed Russia could still be ignored, that its threats were empty. But the events in Georgia suggest that Russia once again has real military power, and a willingness to use it.

Military Modernization²

In March 2001, Putin named Sergei Ivanov, an old KGB colleague and Kremlin protégé, as Defense Minister. Putin and Ivanov announced an ambitious reform program that appeared designed to return the Russian military to its former status as a global superpower. Funded by the rising prices of oil and natural gas, the Russian defense budget soared.³ Plans called for converting the military to an all-volunteer basis and eliminating peacetime conscription by 2012. More rigorous training schedules and innovative exercises suggested that the Russians were developing new doctrines, preparing to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Investments were made in developing new weapon systems and platforms and in purchasing new hardware. Next-generation nuclear missiles, night-capable attack helicopters and new fighter planes and tanks began to enter service. Naval ship-building resumed, delivering new submarines and blue-water ships. Long-range, precision-guided cruise missiles, theater missile defenses and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) were designed by Russia's reviving defense industry.

The plans suggested that Russia wanted to once again be a peer competitor to the United States. If fully implemented, the reforms would produce a highly-trained professional force, equipped with the latest in military hardware, prepared to fight on a 21st century battlefield. However, the implementation has fallen somewhat short of the rhetoric. Russian officers have vigorously resisted efforts to further reduce the size of the military, requiring the retention of a significant conscript component. To say that recruitment and retention of volunteers⁴ has been disappointing would be an understatement,⁵ as Russians seem no more eager to volunteer than they are to be drafted.

Some of the underlying problems have been recognized and are being addressed. Military pay has been doubled and a massive building program has been underway to deliver adequate housing for soldiers. The

creation of a specialized peacekeeping brigade and the announcement that conscripts would no longer be deployed to conflict areas indicate that the Russian defense establishment is keenly aware of the inferiority of its conscript soldiers. After several conscripts died in hazing incidents, Ivanov announced that a professional noncommissioned officer corps would be developed, and the promotion of conscripts to sergeant would be phased out. For now, professionalization is focusing only on elite units: the Strategic Missile Forces, the navy, air forces and airborne units. The government has said that the military will remain at its present size, which suggests that conscripts will continue to provide the bulk of military manpower.

In February 2007, Ivanov was succeeded as Defense Minister by an economist and former Tax Ministry official, Anatoliy Serdyukov. Although he seems to be focused primarily on reducing waste and fraud, Serdyukov has produced a new reorganization plan intended to address shortcomings exposed by the operations in Georgia.⁶ The lack of precision-guided munitions, unmanned aerial systems and other modern equipment meant that the Russian military fought like a combined-arms force of decades ago, rather than a 21st century, information age force.⁷ Among other changes, the plan is said to include the elimination of 150,000 officer billets. Resistance from the officer corps is said to be fierce, and most information about the plan has been classified. The dearth of information makes it difficult to evaluate the reforms, but the rumored resistance suggests that their fate will be similar to that of previous plans.

On the hardware side, the picture is equally mixed. News stories have highlighted several big-ticket items. In 2006, the Russian army began deploying the new Iskander short-range ballistic missile and the Mi-28N night-capable attack helicopter. The following year, Sukhoi delivered the first two Su-34s, Russia's next-generation fighter/bomber, and construction began on the *Admiral Sergei Gorshkov*, lead ship of a new class of missile frigates. The *Yury Dolgorukiy*, the first nuclear submarine built since 1992, was launched in February 2008. However, a close look at the procurement numbers tells a somewhat less compelling story. The Russians are expected to have only 20 of the advanced Su-34s in service in 2009, and by 2008 the army had received only 300 of the most advanced T-90 main battle tanks. Although the defense ministry has ordered 300 new Mi-28Ns, only 50 will be ready by 2010—assuming production targets are met.⁸

Regarding both personnel and equipment, advancements *are* being made. However, the Russian armed forces remain very far from the modern fighting force described in the plans from the early part of the decade. And with the prices of oil and natural gas falling, the government's ability to continue investing in expensive hardware is seriously in doubt. Recent events and revised reform plans suggest that the Russian military is building a small, elite core of professional soldiers, sailors and airmen equipped with modern weaponry. But the bulk of the military will continue to be poorly equipped conscripts of dubious battlefield value.

Inescapable Demographics⁹

Putin signaled in October 2006 that there would be no more large reductions in military personnel,¹⁰ leaving Russia with a force numbering approximately one million. Officers are thought to account for nearly half of the force; enlisted volunteers number no more than 150,000, and probably considerably less.¹¹ Since the conscription period has been shortened from two years to one, the suggestion is that Russia will need to conscript at least 400,000 young men¹² each year to maintain the military at its present size. That could be difficult.

The Russian population peaked in 1992 at 148 million and has declined every year since. The birth rate dropped precipitously in the late 1980s and has not recovered. The death rate has risen continuously over the past 20 years, especially among men. Together, these two trends have produced a net loss of seven million people, a 4.6 percent decline, in 15 years. The early 1990s did see several million ethnic Russians return to Russia from former Soviet Republics. But it was not enough to offset the declining population, and immigration has since fallen to statistical insignificance. Other nations—notably Japan and much of Europe—are experiencing a similar decline in fertility. However, falling life expectancies in Russia are producing not just an aging populace, but a rapidly shrinking one. The implications of these trends are serious, although their ultimate outcome is not clear.¹³

The health of the Russian population has also been declining. Although public health information is spotty (e.g., a 2002 census of child health remains classified), all indications are that HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and drug and alcohol addiction are rising at alarming rates, especially among military-age males. Combined with general malnutrition and poor health care delivery systems, these problems result in one-third of potential conscripts being rejected for medical reasons, and one-half of those accepted being placed on medical restriction.¹⁴ In the coming years, conscription boards will need to call up some 600,000 young men in order to find 400,000 healthy enough to serve.

Slightly more than 900,000 boys were born in Russia in 1991. (They will turn 18 in 2009.) Thereafter, the birth rate continued to decline, bottoming out at 614,000 boys in 1999. Since then, male births have risen slightly to around 750,000 per year.¹⁵ Considering the rate at which those eligible are actually conscripted, that is a very small number of young men from which to draw.¹⁶ Although several categories have been abolished, deferral of service further reduces the number of conscripts. Russians are eligible for conscription until age 27, so it might be possible to call up older men who were not called up when they turned 18. However, such measures are likely to be difficult and deeply unpopular.¹⁷

How, then, do the Russians expect to fill out their million-man military? Russia analyst Keir Giles offers several possible explanations, ranging from the conspiratorial (that Putin has deliberately engineered a manning crisis in order to justify staying in power) to the darkly comical (that Russian officials have no idea how large the military is).¹⁸ But the most likely answer is that the military is only that large on paper, and the real military is much smaller.

During the Cold War, the Soviet order of battle listed 175 active army divisions. However, when analysts looked more closely, intelligence revealed that more than half of those divisions were merely cadre divisions, with 90 percent of their positions unfilled.¹⁹ Something similar is probably at work in the Russian military today. Many of the one million men are probably empty billets, not actual soldiers. Active cadre divisions, together with unfilled positions in regular units and empty posts created for the purpose of enriching their commanders, could account for thousands of billets that won't require conscripts to fill them. Giles concludes that even if this is the case, the dwindling number of healthy, available conscripts will eventually catch up with disingenuous defense leaders.²⁰ But if he underestimates the number of empty billets and the military's willingness and ability to obfuscate, Russia could retain a million-man army on paper for some time to come.

Economic Recovery

During the 1990s, the Russian economy made the wrenching transition from a state-owned, centrally planned economy to a more-or-less free market one. Although several neighboring countries shared the experience, there were few precedents to follow and little understanding of how it should be accomplished. The transition produced massive economic dislocation as inefficient state-owned companies closed and workers were laid off. Prices soared when government price controls were lifted. Demand for Russia's military manufactures declined along with government revenue. The picture was not entirely bleak, however. While the sale of government-owned businesses for bargain prices enriched a few well-connected buyers, it also allowed the restructuring of key Russian industries. The emergence of an enormous gray market in consumer and household goods fostered bottom-up free enterprise, and it has gradually been brought under government regulation. The Soviet legacy of heavy manufacturing has continued to bring export earnings from former Soviet satellite states that lack such capabilities, and Russia's vast natural resources have produced lucrative extraction industries.

Putin brought the era of the "oligarchs"²¹ to an end and has renationalized the oil and natural gas industries, making the government once again the biggest player in the Russian economy. Some economists believe that oil and gas account for as much as 25 percent of gross domestic product, making the Russian economy heavily dependent on its energy exports.²² Others, however, contend that with a large manufacturing base, an internal market of 140 million consumers and other profitable sectors such as timber and metals, a prolonged

collapse in the prices of oil and gas would not wreck Russia's economy.²³ It might, however, seriously impact government finances and dry up investment capital. The Russian government has made significant strides in tax and welfare reform in recent years, which, along with a large investment fund, could cushion the blow of lost revenue. However, the financial sector remains underdeveloped and heavily dependent on investments from large corporations, which limits further growth and development of the economy.

The global economic crisis has hit Russia's fledgling stock market hard, while falling commodity prices and flagging demand for exports are likely to produce economic contraction for 2009. Government stimulus spending may yet pull the economy back from the brink, but the long-term outlook for the Russian economy is unclear. Russia has certainly recovered from the lows of the 1990s and regained a measure of the economic power it once commanded.²⁴ However, the recovery remains fragile and the effects of population decline on the economy could be quite serious.

The Search for Global Prestige

Russian officials generally describe their principal foreign policy goals as increasing their international influence and pursuing economic prosperity.²⁵ This is an understandable reaction to the experience of the 1990s, when Russia was transformed, almost overnight, from one of the world's two superpowers into a poverty-stricken backwater. However, the result is an almost mercantilist foreign policy in which the state intervenes heavily in the economy and clashes frequently with other nations, jockeying for advantage.²⁶

Russian officials make much of the fact that they have abandoned the ideological struggle of the Cold War, which is true: the new Russia is less dogmatic and more pragmatic. But Russians seem to miss the days when the whole world watched summits between their president and the U.S. president. They are nostalgic for a time when they were consulted on every issue and no one would dream of meddling in the part of the globe they controlled. Russia as a nation seems to be searching for the prestige it once enjoyed as a major player on the international stage. Not content to be treated merely as a sovereign nation, Russia wants to belong once again to the exclusive club of powerful nations whose influence extends well beyond their borders. This search for respect complicates U.S. relations, as, for example, when Russians expect exclusive authority over what they call their "near abroad": the other nations that were once part of the Soviet Union.

One theme that seems to run consistently through Russia's foreign policy is an almost reflexive opposition to the United States, even when their interests might be better served by cooperation. To some extent, this may be simply old habits of thought: most of the Russian elite came of age in Soviet Russia and were educated in Communist institutions of higher learning. However, there may be some truth to the idea that the Russians are attempting to create an alternative global power center. Other nations, including France and India, have sought precisely that goal in recent decades. Some Russian disagreements with the United States may even be a deliberate attempt to gain prestige by forcing others to take them into account. If it eases relations and improves cooperation, the United States should consider treating Russia as an equal at times.

Foreign Policy Issues

A number of specific issues complicate the bilateral relationship between the United States and Russia:²⁷

Separatist movements. The Russian government seems to have crushed the separatist movement in the border province of Chechnya. A pro-Moscow provincial government has remained in power for several years and violence has subsided, enabling rebuilding and the withdrawal of most military forces. Sympathetic movements in neighboring regions Dagestan and Ingushetia have similarly quieted. However, a core group of radical Islamists still resist Russian rule, and the quiet may reflect the population's war-weariness more than capitulation. Ten years of brutal violence has engendered deep hatred on both sides, and the Caucasus region has seen numerous ethnic conflicts in the past two decades. The future of Chechnya may not be a settled issue yet.

For the United States, Chechnya has been a tricky issue. Although opposed to secessionist movements and organizations that use terrorism, the United States has found it difficult to ignore the heavy-handed way in which Russia has dealt with its citizens. Russian officials have bristled at criticism of their domestic affairs, and the United States has had few options besides verbal condemnation. Should the conflict flare up again, U.S. policymakers will face the same difficult questions.

The wars in Chechnya have also complicated Moscow's relationship with Muslims. Although few Muslim-majority nations have supported the Chechen bid for independence, extremist groups have expressed sympathy with their aims and have contributed to the increasing radicalization of some Chechen separatists. The Taliban government of Afghanistan recognized the Chechen government in 1999, and in 2007, Chechen resistance leader Doku Umarov declared himself Emir of the North Caucasus. Muslims constitute 10 to 15 percent of the Russian population, and their numbers are growing even as the ethnic Russian population shrinks.

Color revolutions. Since the end of the Cold War, most of the nations that made up the Communist Bloc have gone through slow, halting transitions toward democracy. While Russia has experienced considerable backsliding in recent years, some of its neighbors have seen dramatic triumphs of popular will, often named for a color or other symbol used by protestors (e.g., roses in Georgia, the color orange in Ukraine) to indicate their solidarity. The phrase "color revolution" has become a sort of short-hand for peaceful attempts to overthrow autocratic leaders and usher in real democracy.

The Russian government has tended to condemn these movements as disorderly challenges to legitimate governments. This has put Moscow at odds with the United States and much of the international community, which tend to support democracy movements and civil society groups in nondemocratic countries. Russian officials have decried this "meddling" in the internal affairs of other nations, especially those of their "near abroad." Interestingly, this principle has not restrained Russia from threatening its neighbors and intervening in civil wars. Use of the term "near abroad" seems to be the rhetorical element of an effort to recreate some semblance of their former empire, creating a zone of exclusive influence covering the nations on their periphery.²⁸

The nations in question (the Baltics, the Caucasus, the Central Asian states) have reacted differently, some taking advantage of Russian support, others seeking closer ties to Europe and the United States as counterweights. The Soviet legacies of economic ties and ethnic Russian minorities have made the relationships that much more complicated. The United States has tried to avoid a return to Cold War-era confrontation with Russia or a new division of the world into spheres of influence; it has been a difficult path to tread.

NATO expansion. When the Cold War ended, the member nations of NATO debated whether the alliance still served any purpose. Concluding that the member nations did still need a mutual defense pact, they began admitting nations that had formerly belonged to the rival Warsaw Pact, tying more and more countries into Europe's solid security architecture. As NATO has expanded eastward, Russia has raised vague objections, insinuating that the alliance is still aimed at them.²⁹ NATO has gone to great lengths to ease Russian fears, specifying that the alliance is defensive in nature and creating a special consultative council with Russia. However, Moscow continues to object to membership for additional nations and the positioning of alliance military assets closer to the Russian border. Meanwhile, the nations of the "near abroad" continue to ask for closer ties with, and eventual membership in, NATO, largely out of fear of their intimidating neighbor.

Missile defense. The U.S. program to build ballistic missile defenses (BMD) has also complicated relations with Russia. Fearing the weakening of their nuclear deterrent, Russia protested the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2001. The installation of interceptors on the U.S. west coast to protect against missiles from North Korea did not seem to concern Russia overmuch; however, the planned placement of a system in Eastern Europe to protect against Iranian missiles has drawn harsh condemnation.³⁰

Russian offers to cooperate on BMD have been largely ignored by the United States, which seems to doubt their sincerity or utility, or have stalled due to disagreements.³¹ In an escalating rhetorical campaign, Russian officials have hinted they might withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, warned Poland and the Czech Republic not to accept the stationing of the system on their soil and said they would deploy Iskander-M missile batteries to Kaliningrad.³² As they move forward, the United States and NATO will need to weigh carefully the need for a European missile shield against the destabilizing effect it is having on European security.

The Arctic. In August 2007, a Russian scientific expedition dove to the ocean floor at the North Pole and left behind a small Russian flag. Until recently, competing territorial claims among Canada, Norway, Denmark, Russia and the United States in the Arctic garnered little attention, even from the governments involved. Technology and climate change are making the harvesting of seafloor resources more feasible, and the potential environmental impacts are drawing attention from nations with no claim in the area. The five Arctic nations met in May 2008 to begin discussions of how to govern this vast area of the Earth's surface.³³ A peaceful agreement seems entirely possible, although some observers warn darkly of an international power struggle over lucrative oil and mineral wealth.

Arms sales. Russia has long been a major arms supplier; since the end of the Cold War, foreign sales have been vital to keeping the Russian defense industry operating. However, their largely ethics-free export policies have sometimes put them at odds with attempts to restrict the flow of weapons to irresponsible nations. Russia's two biggest customers are China—which has been under a U.S. and European arms embargo since the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident—and India, which has been under arms sales restrictions since their nuclear weapons tests in 1998. Russia also sells weapons to state sponsors of terrorism such as Iran and Syria, and to Lebanon, a country partly controlled by a terrorist organization, Hezbollah. Russia's long list of buyers includes other unsavory regimes, such as the Sudanese government. Russia has shown some willingness to work with the international community on arms restrictions, recently placing the sale of the S-300 surface-to-air missile system to Iran on hold.³⁴ There may be room for further cooperation with Russia on this issue.

Some analysts wonder whether Russian weapons makers will be able to remain competitive with Western firms given the disparity in technology and research budgets.³⁵ U.S. and European companies benefit enormously from their ability to share technology and work together, while Russian companies are shut out of the Western market because of concerns about proliferation. If the Russians were more responsible about their export policies, their companies might gain greater access.

Nuclear proliferation. For 17 years, the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program has been quietly consolidating, securing and dismantling the former Soviet Union's weapons of mass destruction and their vast research and production infrastructure.³⁶ This important program has greatly reduced the risk of proliferation and may provide a model for future efforts in other places, such as North Korea. It also represents an area of long-standing cooperation between the United States and Russia that the two countries could build on.

Russian cooperation is vital to countering proliferation elsewhere. For example, Russia is the major supplier of nuclear power technology to Iran and has offered to supply Iran with nuclear fuel. (If accepted, the offer would obviate the need for Iran to develop its own enrichment capacity and ensure that none was diverted to weapons production.) Russia has cooperated with some U.S. and European efforts to sanction Iran and limit their acquisition of nuclear technology. Russian cooperation is essential to the effort to prevent the development of Iranian nuclear weapons.

Arms control. Russia and the United States also have a long history of successful cooperation on voluntary arms control, even at the height of Cold War tensions. Although recent years have seen the arms control relationship fray (e.g., the dissolution of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the suspension of the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty) the two nations have begun discussions on a successor to the Strategic

Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which expires in December 2009. The expressions of goodwill and mutual interest that have surrounded these talks are a welcome change from the mutual condemnations of recent years and may bode well for the future of U.S.-Russian relations.

The Future

In late 2007, Russia watchers speculated feverishly over who would succeed Vladimir Putin in Russia's powerful presidency. Constitutionally limited to only two consecutive terms, Putin was expected to choose a successor from among his inner circle and retain significant influence after the March election. In December, Putin selected Dmitry Medvedev, a St. Petersburg lawyer and businessman who was then serving as First Deputy Prime Minister. Medvedev announced that he would appoint Putin as prime minister, and the two campaigned together, winning handily. Observers noted that Putin could run for the presidency again in 2012, which would make Medvedev something of a caretaker.

One year into his term, Medvedev remains something of an enigma.³⁷ Putin has undoubtedly remained in power, though he has receded from public view. For the most part, Medvedev has seemed to play the role of genial figurehead, largely limiting his public statements to platitudes and toeing the line of Putin's government on policy. However, he has reached out to critics of the government in recent months, granting an interview to opposition newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and reviving a presidential council of civil society groups.³⁸ It is too soon to tell whether these moves represent a real departure from authoritarianism or merely a public relations ploy. If Medvedev is serious about changing Russian governance, he will have to take on many entrenched interests, including his predecessor. But he does have a very powerful tool at his disposal: the Russian presidency into which Putin concentrated so much power.

Conclusion

After the fighting in Georgia last August, many observers concluded that Russia was once again a major global actor, willing and able to pursue its interests and impose its will on others. Buoyed by an economic revival and united by the desire for national prestige, the Russians' long sojourn in the wilderness was over. Whispers of a new Cold War were heard in some quarters. A close look at the evidence provides a somewhat different picture, however. Russia's military modernization seems to be more rhetoric than reality, its economic revival remains tenuous and its population decline could undermine whatever gains have been achieved. Russia will remain a prickly international actor, and yet cooperation on some issues is very important to U.S. interests.

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, once a Russia analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency, said in an interview, "I think one of the challenges facing the new administration is figuring out . . . where you push back on the Russians and where there are opportunities to build a closer relationship."³⁹ This neatly encapsulates the difficulty of this important relationship. Russia is neither a friend nor an enemy of the United States. Trust is clearly impossible, although treating them with respect may pay dividends. The United States should work with Russia where possible, pursuing arms control agreements and soliciting cooperation on countering proliferation. At the same time, the United States must stand firm against Russian bullying of its neighbors, continuing to weave other former Communist nations into the fabric of Europe despite Russian objections. It will be a difficult balance to strike, but U.S. interests require it.

The future of Russia is as unclear as its past has been eventful. Whatever the future holds, Russia will continue to be an important nation in global affairs. Americans would do well to look beyond clichés and avoid recreating the Cold War, to seek a deeper understanding of the factors and motivations that drive this problematic partner.

Author's note: This essay builds on work done by the author and four colleagues at George Washington University. The author owes a great debt to Jeffery Bowen, Stacy Groff, Gregory Panaccione and Jason Richards, with whom he co-authored *Russia: Demographic Trends and the Projection of Military Power*, a paper presented at The International Studies Association's ISA's 50th Annual Convention, 15 February 2009, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p312179_index.html.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Nuclear Policy in the 21st Century Environment," Carnegie Moscow Center, Autumn 2005, <http://www.carnegie.ru/en/pubs/media/73180.htm>.
- ² This section was adapted from a section written by the author in Jeffery Bowen, et al., *Russia: Demographic Trends and the Projection of Military Power*, Paper presented at the International Studies Association's 50th Annual Convention, 15 February 2009, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p312179_index.html. It draws on research done by Jeffery Bowen on the modernization plans.
- ³ Estimating Russian defense spending with any accuracy is a laborious process with little guarantee of success. But analysts at the International Institute for Strategic Studies estimated that such spending rose 69 percent in real terms from 2003 to 2007. See James Hacket, ed., *Military Balance 2007* (London: IISS) for a discussion. More generally, IISS's annual publication provided much of the information in this section, along with news accounts.
- ⁴ In Russia, volunteers are generally referred to as contract soldiers because they sign an employment contract, as opposed to conscripts who are fulfilling their service obligation.
- ⁵ See Hacket, ed., *Military Balance 2007*. IISS analysts report figures for three recruiting districts as 45 percent, 25 percent and 17 percent of targets for 2004. Although no source is cited, the suggestion is that these are representative.
- ⁶ Dale Herspring, "Russia's Military in the Throes of Change," *Radio Free Europe*, 16 December 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russias_Military_In_The_Throes_Of_Change/1360375.html.
- ⁷ Nikita Petrov, "Russian Army's weaknesses exposed during war in Georgia," *RIA Novosti*, 9 September 2008, <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20080909/116657490.html>, and Christian Lowe, "Georgia war shows Russian army strong but flawed," *Reuters*, 20 August 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/newsOne/idUSLK23804020080820>.
- ⁸ See Hacket, ed., *Military Balance 2007* and Richard Weitz, *Russia's military-industrial complex*, Hudson Institute, 4 June 2007, http://www.hudson.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=publication_details&id=4947.
- ⁹ The ideas in this section were first introduced to the author by Jason Richards and Gregory Panaccione during work on *Russia: Demographic Trends and the Projection of Military Power*, 2009.
- ¹⁰ *Transcript of the Hot Line with President of Russia Vladimir Putin*, 25 October 2006, http://kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/10/25/0911_type148987_113064.shtml.
- ¹¹ The only open sources for the numbers serving in the Russian military are various (often contradictory) public statements by senior Ministry of Defense officials. For a discussion of the figures see Keir Giles, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? Russia's Military Plans Versus Demographic Reality*, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, October 2006, [http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/russian/06\(47\)KG.pdf](http://www.da.mod.uk/colleges/arag/document-listings/russian/06(47)KG.pdf).
- ¹² Women are not currently subject to conscription.

- ¹³ Dr. Murray Feshbach is widely acknowledged as one of the foremost experts on Russian demographics—his work has even been used by Russian health officials. Dr. Feshbach has described these trends in numerous publications and interviews over the past two decades. His most recent publication on the topic is “Russian Demography, Health and the Military: Current and Future Issues,” *ASCI Research Report No. 8*, April 2008, <http://asci.researchhub.ssrc.org/russian-demography-health-and-the-military-current-and-future-issues/attachment>. Although now somewhat dated, a 2001 study by the RAND Corp. identifies the same trends and offers a broader, more comprehensive examination of the issues. See Julie DaVanzo and Clifford Grammich, *Dire Demographics: Population Trends in the Russian Federation*, RAND Corp., 2001, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1273/.
- ¹⁴ Feshbach, “Russian Demography, Health and the Military,” p. 13.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23. Figures cited are net of infant mortality.
- ¹⁶ Giles, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?* pp. 2–3. Officially, 9.7 percent of those eligible are actually drafted. However, Giles tried to reconcile that figure with the available population and the reported numbers of conscripts—and failed, leaving the actual yield rate an open question.
- ¹⁷ Giles, Feshbach and the RAND study all discuss the apparent impossibility of the task of manning the Russian military from the population available. The best on this specific point is probably Giles.
- ¹⁸ Giles, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?* pp. 17–19.
- ¹⁹ See chapter 4 of Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much is Enough?* (New York: Harper & Row), 1971.
- ²⁰ Giles, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?* p. 18.
- ²¹ The term *oligarch* was commonly used to describe a small group of extremely wealthy businessmen who dominated the Russian economy and were virtually above the law. See Andrew Mueller, “What a carve-up!” *The Guardian* (London), 3 December 2005, The Guide, p. 4.
- ²² See, for example: *Russia: Country Profile 2008* (Economist Intelligence Unit), p. 29, www.eiu.com (subscription required).
- ²³ See Olga Oliker, et al., *Russian Foreign Policy: Sources and Implications* (RAND Corp.) 2009, pp. 47–52, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG768/>.
- ²⁴ As a major supplier of natural gas, Russia has frequently disrupted supplies to European nations during the winter months. The policy may backfire if European nations seek out more reliable sources, but it appears to be producing short-term satisfaction, if not better profits. See Philip Pan, “Economy, Politics Stoke Russia-Ukraine Gas Quarrel,” *The Washington Post*, 8 January 2009, p. A8.
- ²⁵ Oliker, et al., *Russian Foreign Policy*, 2009, pp. 87–90.
- ²⁶ See Robert Kagan, “New Europe, Old Russia,” *The Washington Post*, 6 February 2008, p. A19, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/05/AR2008020502879.html>.
- ²⁷ For a more detailed overview of the relationship, see Eugene Rumer and Angela Stent, “Repairing U.S.-Russian Relations,” April 2009, <http://ceres.georgetown.edu/68244.html>.
- ²⁸ For a discussion of the origins of the term, see William Safire, “ON LANGUAGE: The Near Abroad,” *The New York Times*, 22 May 1994, 6:16, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/05/22/magazine/on-language-the-near-abroad.html>.
- ²⁹ See, for example, Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, “Containing Russia: Back to the Future?” 19 July 2007, <http://www.geneva.mid.ru/speeches/52.html>.
- ³⁰ “U.S. missile defense aimed at Russian nuclear deterrent – Ivanov,” *RIA Novosti*, 6 February 2009, <http://en.rian.ru/world/20090206/120024515.html>.
- ³¹ Richard Weitz, “Russian-American Security Cooperation after St. Petersburg,” Strategic Studies Institute, April 2007, p. 14, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=775>.

- ³² Vladimir Socor, "Russia Warns of Missile Forward-Deployment in Kaliningrad Region," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 4, no. 131, 6 July 2007, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=32850](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=32850). The Iskander is an advanced, short-range ballistic missile.
- ³³ "Conference could mark start of Arctic power struggle," *Canwest News Service*, 28 May 2008, <http://www.canada.com/topics/news/world/story.html?id=d0135cd8-c15a-48a3-9579-0df5f8e185c1>.
- ³⁴ "Russia not supplying air defence systems to Iran: official," *Agence France Presse*, 15 April 2009.
- ³⁵ Olikier, et al., *Russian Foreign Policy*, 2009, pp. 82.
- ³⁶ See <http://lugar.senate.gov/nunnlugar/index.cfm> for more information.
- ³⁷ For a discussion of the relationship between the two men and Medvedev's role, see Robert Coalson, "Medvedev Marks a Year in the Kremlin, But Does He Rule?" *Radio Free Europe*, 7 May 2009, <http://www.rferl.org/articleprintview/1623372.html>.
- ³⁸ *Novaya Gazeta* is well-known for its unflinching criticism of the government—and for the fact that four of its reporters have died under suspicious circumstances since 2000. The first three deaths were met with public indifference by Putin, but after the killing of Anastasia Baburova in January 2009, Medvedev spoke with the newspaper's leaders to express his condolences. He also granted them his first newspaper interview as president. See Ellen Barry, "Medvedev Visits the Newspaper Where Slain Journalists Worked," *The New York Times*, 31 January 2009, p. A7; and Sarah Schafer, "Medvedev Grants Interview to Anti-Kremlin Newspaper," *The Washington Post*, 16 April 2009, p. A10. The interview, in which Medvedev discusses civil society groups, can be found at <http://en.novayagazeta.ru/data/2009/039/00.html>.
- ³⁹ Interview with Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, *The Charlie Rose Show*, 17 December 2008.

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