

Russia's Security Agenda vis-à-vis Transatlantic Developments after the War in Iraq

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The sharp disagreements among Western countries over U.S. actions in Iraq are a serious test for Moscow for several reasons. First, although disagreements in the West have occurred before and indeed deepened after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the Iraq crisis is qualitatively different. NATO members disagreed about the expansion of the alliance and the operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Kosovo, but during the Iraqi crisis they have reached the critical level of a “split.” Second, despite great pains, Russia has almost adapted to its new role as a regional power rather than a global power. Two notions have factored into its practical foreign and security policy and, sometimes, even into its rhetoric. These are the recognition, first, of U.S. unilateral dominance in the security domain, particularly after the war in Afghanistan, and second, of Russia's limited leverage, whether military-technical or political, to influence international security decisionmaking.

Finally, for the first time since World War II, Russia appeared to be the insider in the transatlantic crisis. In fact, during the Iraq crisis Russia almost lost one of its few advantages of the previous period: the position of outside observer that it assumed as a consequence of the August 1998 financial crisis and the disputes over Kosovo in 1999. After September 11, 2001, Russia's “outsider” position lost its negative characteristics while giving Russia considerable freedom to maneuver in the international arena. In 2002–2003, Moscow had to deal with most of the problems accompanying insider status, such as the notorious Jackson-Vanik amendment and lack of support for WTO membership, but had not and still has not managed to enjoy the advantages that come with being considered an insider. Still, the key problem remains a lack of trust.

Achieving insider status was the result of the Kremlin's policy during the last decade of gaining acceptance as a “full member” of the Western community. President Vladimir Putin has followed successfully former president Boris Yeltsin's efforts to enlarge the Group of Seven to the Group of Eight (G-8). Part of being an insider, though, meant that at the peak of the conflict over Iraq, Western powers forced Russia into the debates, trying to get it to support one of the conflicting sides.

This situation was not only unexpected, but also highly undesirable for Moscow. Because institutions remain of key importance for Russian security and foreign policy, attempts to strengthen the G-8 were aimed at making this organization compensate for

the growing weakness of international institutions in general, and the United Nations and NATO in particular. No less important a consideration is that the G-7 (8) has come to symbolize for Moscow a Western club, a unity, a value. The Iraq crisis, however, has demonstrated that the West is far from monolithic.

Trying to restore the unanimity of the "big eight" (as the G-8 is known in Russia) while promoting its own policy line, Russia convened the leaders of the G-8 states in St. Petersburg in May 2003, before the summit in Evian in June 2003. As the Iraq crisis revealed, Russia was not able to choose between the United States and Europe. Moscow was realistic enough not to pretend it could be a mediator, but still worked to manage the crisis. The second round of transatlantic crisis-regulation started in September 2003, when Washington, for reasons having to do with the postwar situation in Iraq as well as upcoming elections, decided to internationalize Iraq's reconstruction and get a mandate from the United Nations Security Council. It revealed that the Western allies were open to bargaining. Russia's ability to influence the situation was thus weakened. The Bush-Putin meeting at Camp David in September did not bring a breakthrough. Russia's approach to transatlantic relations remains an open problem.

The fact that the autumn of 2003 has been the campaign season for elections to the State Duma has further complicated the picture in Russia. A new concept of border security (mainly concerning the states of the former Soviet Union) has arisen, with Russia signing agreements that pose obstacles to the concept of a common economic space in Europe and a visa-free regime created with EU countries. Russia has taken this stance to improve integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which still is a rather popular concept in Russia. The fact that Putin now seems to advocate further integration within the CIS has denied the Communist Party of one of its strongest platforms.

Putin also made many declarations after the U.S.-Russia summit at Camp David that added to the confusion about Russia's foreign policy orientation. Emphasis is now being placed on preventive strikes in Russian military strategy. Putin stressed that his country possesses dozens of MIRVed missiles in reserve, which can overcome any antimissile defense system. The Russian government has also announced that military reform is almost complete (although experts insist it has hardly been started); that there will be no further reductions in the armed forces; and that the Russian military is starting to restructure and modernize. This rhetoric, apart from being part of the election campaign, has provoked questions regarding the results of the September 2003 Bush-Putin summit.

If Moscow's security orientation and attitude toward the transatlantic community are not clear, this will cause problems for both Russia and its partners in the West. It will be even more important to clarify security priorities and intentions in 2004, when Putin will be forced to make a post-election decision either to step up the pace of reforms or to maintain the status quo and thus stagnate the reform process for the next four years. To elaborate a strategy on issues of security and transatlantic ties, Russia must answer the following questions. What types of controversies exist between Russia and the transatlantic community (e.g., regarding security, the economy, etc.)? How deep do these conflicts run? How can they be overcome and when can this occur? How do these

conflicts concern Russia? What are Russia's national security interests, and how can Russia's national security goals be implemented?

Transatlantic Problems and How They Concern Russia

During the 1990s, Russia regularly defied the transatlantic community. Suppressed by circumstances left over from the Cold War, conflicts between Russia and the West intensified due to changes in national economies, increased European integration, and the faster pace of globalization. In the security domain, these divergences were exacerbated by NATO's enlargement and encroachment on Russia's borders. Traditional security concerns were, for the most part, no longer a priority. In addition, after a long period of reduced defense spending, demilitarization lost its role as a priority, largely due to technological, economic, political, and security reasons. The military industrial complex has thus once again become a key factor in international, and especially transatlantic, relations. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, served as a catalyst for the creation of a new phase in the development of international security. Terrorism has become a universal definition for threats to global security, but locating these threats and determining their roots and ways to cope with them has become a source of disagreement and contention in the international arena. Disagreement in the international community is mostly about the interpretation of what constitutes a legitimate use of force rather than about whether countries should be ready to use power. The question is not whether or not to use power, but rather, whether power should govern international law or whether laws should govern the use of power. In a country where the source of almost all problems is the failure of the rule of law, there is no question which of these methods of thinking Russia will choose to follow in its foreign policy decisions.

The crisis over Iraq has deepened disagreements within Europe as differences over Iraq do not only engage security and foreign policy considerations but also economic concerns. EU enlargement has been aimed at building an economic power to rival the United States. This will not succeed, however, if Europe continues to follow the path it took during the Iraq crisis. The battle continues in the EU Convention over the future EU constitution. In addition, the future of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in an enlarged EU looks even less probable than before, with Poland openly declaring that there is no security without the United States, just as there is no economic prosperity without the EU. For Russia, this means that a meaningful European security structure is still a distant prospect and that, depending on the actions of the U.S. administration, the United States and NATO will remain the two structures vital to international security.

Despite the decisions made at the Prague summit in 2003, the future of NATO remains uncertain. This is not due only to the imbalance between the defense budgets of the United States and Europe, but also to differences between the democratic norms and laws of different member countries. In this "brave new world," functional and expedient responses to threats are sometimes chosen at the expense of the defense of common values. Ad hoc coalitions of willing participants are likely to be more flexible and thus more effective tools in coping with terrorist threats. The members of these coalitions are often countries that either border Russia or are its allies in the CIS Collective Security Treaty. In fact, the idea of a post-Cold War security system based on international law

and international institutions and in accordance with democratic and legal norms was not realized in the 1990s. Now, at the beginning of the century, the system has actually moved in the opposite direction and resembles the pre-Westphalian international system. The ideas of survival of the strongest power, the advantage of a unipolar world led by one superpower, and the non-importance of institutions have once again become popular in international relations.

The degradation of the international security system despite trends such as globalization, the internationalization of the economy, and international competition over energy sources and routes, cause one to question the real reasons for the new way of thinking about security in the United States. It also causes doubt about whether the threat of terrorism affects enough areas and will last long enough to continue to influence ideas about international security.

Does it make sense in these circumstances for Russia to strengthen its cooperation with Europe, the United States, and NATO? The answer, for several reasons, is yes.

The first reason is that Russia must remain active in the international security system, however imperfect and unreliable it is today. The worst damage that could be inflicted on the international security system in the near future would be if the United States disengaged from the international system at large. Without either the United States or Europe, it is impossible for Russia to build a new, more reliable, and sustainable security system.

Second, Russia should remain part of the international security system because it cannot independently handle large-scale threats to its security. Even the United States cannot do this alone, as was shown during the war with Iraq. Third, Russia could return as a main player in international security and foreign relations. To accomplish this, it must become engaged in the system and take part in activities that strengthen its position in the club of leading powers. This will also serve as a guarantee against curtailment of domestic reforms as, for example, practical cooperation with NATO would stimulate military reform in Russia.

Lastly, cooperation with the United States, Europe, and NATO on security issues will enable Russia to withstand threats to its national security by allowing it to receive help from other countries and organizations. Mainly, this will help Russia avoid re-mobilizing its military and keep it from placing all emphasis on military security. These reasons correspond to the demands of Russia's national security agenda.

Internal Security

There are no significant threats to Russia's sociopolitical stability. In the 1990s, Russia overcame threats to its sovereignty, such as secessionist movements that threatened the further disintegration of the country. Currently, solutions can be found to most of Russia's domestic security problems in the socioeconomic, legal, and administrative spheres. Even the realization of the worst-case scenario, which would be the imposition of an authoritarian and undemocratic regime, would not have a negative impact on security, strictly speaking. Chechnya, however, remains Russia's most serious problem. The fact that Russia refers to this conflict as a struggle with international terrorism has

reduced Western pressure on Russia to end the conflict. However, the war continues to enflame tensions in central Russia and aggravates ethnic and religious tensions within the country. Another problem is the rapid population decline in Siberia and the Far East. These areas will either witness a change in ethnic composition as Chinese move into the area, or they will experience a severe labor shortage. This problem can be solved only through complex changes in the socioeconomic and political spheres. This will be impossible without foreign investment and the development of a strong infrastructure and transit routes. Russia's regional security problems—drugs and arms trafficking, illegal migration, organized crime—are largely a result of unsettled border disputes within the Newly Independent States (NIS). Settling these problems does not mean that the NIS countries must give up part of their territory, even though Russia remains very influential. Taking into account the fact that the U.S. government has limited interest in this area, and that this limited interest lies predominantly in the field of security where the United States and Russia have similar interests, the optimal situation for both countries would not necessarily be cooperation, as occurred in Afghanistan, but a joint declaration on the security problems and goals in the region. This would help create not only the normalization of Russia's relations with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, but also internal stabilization in the region itself, thus diminishing the risk of conflicts in the region becoming further exacerbated. There is also a possibility of transferring regulation of these conflicts to international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Group of 8, or other special international groups or commissions. Cooperation with the United States and NATO in the Caspian region could strengthen Russia's position in international security. This would not necessarily contradict Russia's policy of increasing its own economic interests in the Caspian region.

The external threats to Russian security do not differ from the threats to European or U.S. security: terrorism and the proliferation of WMD. The main characteristic of these threats for Russia is that they are both domestic and international in nature. Thus, it is impossible to effectively overcome these threats without international cooperation. Due to the urgency of these new threats, the issues that were central during the 1990s, such as NATO expansion, are no longer security priorities. Thus, even the prospect of the United States building bases in eastern Poland, although not looked upon positively by the Russian government, will not have a large negative impact on U.S.-Russian relations.

The problem of WMD proliferation will require greater cooperation and understanding in the international community. From this point of view, the transatlantic controversies not only contradict Russia's security interests, but also aggravate its position. They serve as grounds for using double standards in managing crises and regulating conflicts, as well as for taking preemptive actions against actors (whether states, groups, or individuals) who may pose a potential threat but without the sanction of international law.

Modernization of existing international norms and institutions (first and foremost the United Nations), and building new ones, would not only consolidate the large area referred to as the transatlantic community, but would also compensate for its current overdependence on the United States in the security sphere, which in itself presents a serious challenge and risk for international security.

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