

# **Putin and Bush, Perfect Together Yet Russia's Alliance with Europe is Inevitable...Eventually**

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At the tactical level, the Putin-Bush alliance against terrorism is secure, but this alliance is based on two wasting assets: Bush's presidency and a shared understanding of what constitutes the terrorist threat. Long-term alliance between Russia and Europe appears inevitable, if not immediately so. Based on the workings of the global balance of power, economic relations, and compatible identities, a Russian-European alliance can be deferred at best, absent a revolutionary change in U.S. foreign policy toward the world more generally.

## **The Effects of the September 11 Attacks**

After September 11, 2001, the Putin administration chose to ally with the Bush administration in its war on terrorism. It did so, first of all, because of its own war in Chechnya, which many Russians have long regarded as a war against terrorism. An alliance with the United States also reinforced Russia's great power identity, as it found itself one of the United States' closest allies.

Putin's Russia also benefited from the restrictions on civil liberties imposed in the United States after September 11, 2001, the self-censorship exercised by the U.S. media on the war in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, and the justifications offered by U.S. decisionmakers for killing civilians in both of these wars, and the doctrine of preventive war in general. Regarding Putin's own law and order campaign in Russia, the growing assertion of state control over Russia's main television channels, the Russian media's self-censorship of atrocities in Chechnya, and the Russian armed forces' killing of civilians in Chechnya, the alliance with the United States gave Russia a powerful stick with which to parry any criticism of growing Russian authoritarianism at home. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and President Putin have recently and repeatedly announced Russia's adoption of the Bush administration's declared policy of making war on any country suspected of being an eventual threat, international law, questionable intelligence, and allied preferences notwithstanding.

Finally and equally important, the tactical alliance against terrorism promised Russia better economic relations with the United States and the West, essential to creating a material base for restoring Russia's status as a great power, a central part of Putin's program since 1999.

## Testing the Alliance

Putin's post-September 11 choice to support the United States in the war on terrorism was put to the test almost immediately with the Bush administration's announcement of the United States' withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, and then the disclosure of the administration's post-Afghanistan target list even before the war in Afghanistan had commenced, when Iraq emerged as the United States' next prime objective. The Bush administration then declared its intention not to pursue further arms control agreements with Russia. It also announced the further enlargement of NATO.

It is the war in Iraq that has posed the greatest challenge to Putin's tactical choice to support the United States after September 11, 2001, because, for the first time, Putin was forced to choose between the United States and Europe. So far, he has played a very clever game of both opposing the United States and acting as a mediator between Germany and France and the Bush administration on the original UN resolutions in November 2002 and the October 2003 resolution. Indeed, Al Qaeda's postwar attraction to Iraq has made the introduction of Russian peacekeepers there, given the appropriate UN authorization, more acceptable to Russian officials, including Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov.

## The Pull of Europe

There are three forces pulling Russia toward Europe: balance of power politics, economics, and Russian identity.

In general, unipolar powers (such as the United States since the collapse of the Soviet Union) are supposed to attract enemies in a balancing coalition. This has not happened to the United States...yet. Still, the Bush administration appears to be doing its best to attract as much opposition from its allies, let alone its enemies, as it can muster through acts such as the war in Iraq, opposed by all but a very few. Russia, to this point, has allied with the United States against terrorism, while allying with Europe, in particular France and Germany, against the unilateral assertion of U.S. dominance in Iraq, in particular, and in the world more generally.

Iran is a revealing test. For years, the United States unilaterally has declared Iran to be a rogue state, supporter of terrorism, pursuer of WMD, and so forth. Europe and Russia have rejected these charges, with Russia claiming that the U.S. intelligence provided to support these charges is less than convincing. Russia repeatedly has been accused of being driven by its \$2 billion nuclear-reactor deal in Bushehr. Since mid-September 2003, however, U.S. administration officials from John Bolton to Colin Powell to Spencer Abraham have praised the Putin administration for pressuring Iran to accept a more comprehensive inspection regime of its nuclear facilities. What changed? The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issued a report raising suspicions about Iran's program. This reflects the power of multilateral institutions. Whatever evidence the United States offered was deemed insufficient and self-serving, but, as the Russian minister of atomic energy Aleksandr Rumiantsev, said, "The IAEA always behaves completely objectively." Russia and Europe are now allied in an effort to convince Iran not to allow the United States to make it into another Iraq.

If Bush loses the presidency in 2004, a cooperative relationship between Europe and the United States will likely be restored. If Bush wins another term, however, and Iran becomes the next U.S. target, Russia and Europe will be pushed together once again. As the liberal leader Grigory Yavlinsky put it in a September 24 call-in program on *Radio Mayak*, it is Russia's and Putin's responsibility to oppose "America's bulldozer policies" in places such as Iraq—and, it can be surmised, Iran. When Putin or Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov travel abroad these days, a collection of businessmen are inevitably in their retinue. They seek foreign investment, markets, and targets of acquisition. At home, Russian big business has unfettered access to the president and his administration. Oligarchs brag about it: Vagit Alekperov, president of LUKOIL, for example, told a reporter that he "did not remember a single case when he could not communicate with the prime minister or any other minister, for that matter... Walls between big business and power in Russia do not exist." Putin declared at the last Davos meeting in Moscow on October 3, 2003, that his reforms include "making the state satisfy business."

Russia is becoming a regional economic power. Whether through the modernization of nuclear power plants in Hungary, the reprocessing of nuclear fuel for Slovenia, a joint venture to build railroad cars in Estonia, LUKOIL's acquisition of Serbia's second-largest network of service stations, or TNK/BP and Gazprom's recent tender for Romania's biggest oil company, Russia's companies and government are using tried and true neocolonial instruments of market penetration in the countries of and around the former Soviet Union.

Europe is a far bigger player than the United States is in Russia's economy, the production of Boeing 777 airframes and ExxonMobil's \$15 billion investment in Sakhalin notwithstanding. Of the \$55 billion invested in the Russian economy by 2003, only 12 percent of this total came from U.S. companies, while almost two-thirds was European, and almost a quarter from Germany alone. Less than 1 percent of Russia's overwhelmingly largest export, energy, goes to the United States. But the EU market remains as much a failed promise as it does a reality. For example, Russia's record grain harvests of 2001 and 2002 did not result in revenue from exports to Europe, but rather 300 percent tariffs against Russian grain.

Russia's efforts to sell arms and nuclear technology abroad are also part of its broader strategy of restoring great power status through economic development. Russia is the second-largest arms exporter in the world, with \$5 billion in sales last year. Although dwarfed by the U.S. total, \$5 billion is a significant sum for Russia, and weaponry is its single-largest, non-energy export. Yet, the role these sales play in developing Russia's scientific and technological base and in permitting the serial production of Russia's highest technology weapons is as important. 70 percent of Russian arms sales are to China and India, but new buyers for fighter planes, helicopters, and naval vessels are appearing in Malaysia, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore. What these countries have in common is the supply of capital necessary for Russian arms manufacturers to invest, either at home or in co-production abroad, in the production of weaponry that would otherwise remain as an advanced prototype at best.

If Europe were ever to become serious about developing its own defense and security profile independent from the United States, as Germany and France seem periodically to

consider, Russia is the perfect ally in many ways. What European militaries need most is precisely what Russia has to offer: long-range air transports; real-time satellite reconnaissance, communications, and intelligence; anti-aircraft and anti-missile defense systems; and advanced tactical fighters: all for a fraction of the cost of European or U.S. production. Moreover, because of a desperate need for capital investment, much of the most technologically advanced Russian military hardware awaits serial production. Europeans have the money to finance Russia's defense industrial complex, and in a direction consonant with European balancing against the United States. Until now, European defense production has been treated more as a social welfare industrial program than as a matter of national security. The Eurofighter, Eurotransport, and Galileo satellite systems are all examples of multibillion-dollar multinational programs that have yet to produce a single new piece of equipment. Each of these systems has available Russian substitutes, always cheaper, and often of more advanced design and capacity.

Finally, undergirding all of this is a deep structural and cultural Russian identification with Europe, not with the United States. The words Eurorenovation, Eurorussian, and Eurostandards do not have any equivalent American anything, because Russians understand what Russia was, is, and will be as well as who Russians are through Europe, not through the United States. High school textbooks teach Russian school children Russia's place in Europe, not in relation to the United States. Popular detective novels, thrillers, romance novels, and pulp fiction in general, are filled with references to Europe, not the United States. The point is that at the deeper structural level of identity relations, Russia is part of Europe and Russians are European, and this should always bias Russian foreign policy, especially if there is ever any public participation on foreign policy issues, toward Europe. Moreover, the tactical alliances made between the United States and Russian political elites will remain just that, tactical, and not become alliances of identity with the potential for integration that an alliance with Europe would have, if ever consummated.

Russia's identification with Europe could have unpredictable effects, however. Take Putin's authoritarianism. Putin constantly asserts the desire for Russia to be a normal, civilized, law-governed European state. He has even linked this need to his economic strategy and has instructed his foreign, economic development, and press ministers to improve Russia's image among foreign investors, admitting that democratization will reassure those investors. But he appears to deviate frequently from this path, and does not respond well to being told his government is not "European." One response we saw was that delivered in late September at a question and answer session at Columbia University, where Putin sparred with audience members. The liberal press in Moscow, *Kommersant* and *Izvestiya*, marveled at their president's forensic skills, snidely commenting on the consequent humiliation of the American questioners.

There was no such smirking in the same newspapers' coverage of Russian prosecutors' repeated failure over the last two years to get European countries to extradite Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Akhmed Zakayev. Instead, in a rather Soviet-Aesopian way, these reporters allowed the defense attorneys of these political refugees (Berezovsky just won that status in Great Britain in September) to list in detail the disgracefully un-European state of the Russian justice and prison system. Alexandros Likurezios, Gusinsky's defense attorney stated that, "The prosecutor assures us there is a law-governed state in Russia. But in what state in *Europe* could you imagine the

following? The president declaring someone to be a criminal before a court has reached a decision? Gusinsky then summed up: “You asked me if I could return to Russia. In 1937 my grandfather was arrested and in two days shot as a German spy. My grandmother was given 11 years in the camps. In 1957 they were both rehabilitated. In 10 years I believe I will return to Russia and get the same document for myself from some Russian court. But not now.” It is no accident that the discredited Soviet past is invoked to delegitimize Putin’s Ministry of Justice. A Greek court’s rejection of Russian evidence against Gusinsky as “political, and not criminal,” got banner headlines in Moscow.

Indeed, it is a daily embarrassment for the Ministry of Justice that its evidence against these three men is repeatedly rejected by European courts, and the Russian prosecutors’ arguments that there is justice in Russia are also found unconvincing. No Russian politician will say that these courts in Great Britain, Spain, Greece, and Denmark, are “cold war avatars” or in the employ of the United States, and thus in fact legitimize the European charges against Putin’s practices. Meanwhile, the questioners at Columbia University are ridiculed for their ignorance by Russian journalists in New York, and accused by Dmitri Rogozin, chairman of the Duma international affairs committee, of “having nostalgia for the Cold War.”

In interacting with Europe in a myriad of ways every day, Russia’s foundational European identity has surfaced, and the contradictions between this identity and Putin’s practices are made manifest.

## **Bush’s Allure...for Putin**

Although Russia’s European choice is more foundational and structural, and thus ultimately more inexorable and inevitable, its American choice is both more conjunctural and real. Russia is able to act out its great power identity with the United States. Together, they fight terrorism around the globe, reserve for themselves the right to make war unencumbered by allies or debate, run the international regime on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, conclude arms control agreements on strategic nuclear forces, and sit on the United Nations Security Council as permanent members. Moreover, each side’s commitment to the war on terrorism allows them to pursue illiberal domestic agendas, institutionalized in the United States in the Patriot and Victory Acts, in the treatment of “non-combatants,” and so on, and in Russia, most brutally in Chechnya, but on a more mundane level, in the construction of civil society from above. Perhaps it is not accidental that Putin’s authoritarianism correlates so positively with his growing personal relationship with Bush and, not accidentally, Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi. And the alliance between the two countries is a highly personalized one, with hardly any domestic roots in either society. Polls taken in the United States and Russia before the September 2003 summit showed that the Russian and American people understand the tactical nature of the alliance very well. 40 percent of Russians and almost 50 percent of Americans asked termed the alliance one of “forced partnership.” Bush’s collapsing poll numbers at home and the ostracism of Bush’s America abroad made Putin a very welcome sight in Camp David during the last week of September. Meanwhile, Bush’s authorization of Putin’s domestic practices is welcome in the Kremlin.

**In Sum...**

Identity relations and balance of power politics point to an eventual alliance between Europe and Russia, but the current political needs of Bush and Putin cement a tactical alliance against terror. U.S. unilateralism can push Europe and Russia closer together, as can U.S. opposition to Russian arms sales abroad. Yet, the EU's barriers to Russian economic aspirations are a serious obstacle to consummating any alliance with Europe, as are Europe's more manifest concerns over Putin's domestic deviations from a genuine European identity.

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