

What To Do About Russia

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In his first term in office, President George W. Bush established and nurtured a close personal relationship with Russian President Vladimir V. Putin. Early on, Bush's overtures toward his counterpart in the Kremlin produced beneficial results for the president's policies. President Bush succeeded in persuading Putin to acquiesce in the abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, a revision of the Cold War arms-control regime that Bush deemed necessary for his security agenda. After the attacks of September 11, Putin sided publicly and unequivocally with the United States in the war on terror, providing material and intelligence assistance to the American military intervention in Afghanistan and not hindering the deployment of American troops in Central Asia. Since then, Russian and American officials claim that the two countries have continued to share intelligence in fighting cooperatively the global war on terror.

During each man's second term, however, the Russian-American bilateral relationship exhibits little of the optimism and enthusiasm expressed immediately after September 11 in both countries about common struggles, new alliances, or shared values. At their recent meetings, both Bush and Putin have made sure to continue to praise each other personally, but behind the rhetoric of friendship is a troubled partnership in drift. In advancing Bush's three central foreign policy objectives — fighting the war on terror, preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and promoting liberty — Russia makes no significant contributions. In addition, the drift toward autocracy inside Russia has helped to produce a Russian foreign policy more at odds with Western interests and values in places like Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Rhetorically and symbolically, Putin and his aides seem determined to rekindle Cold War antagonisms, denouncing "Western" backing for terrorists after the tragedy in Beslan and American "meddling" in fomenting revolution in Ukraine while at the same time conducting joint military maneuvers with China.

President Bush's foreign policy priorities today do not include Russia. He and his foreign policy team are focused first and foremost on stabilizing Iraq, fighting terrorism, managing China's growing power, dealing with Iran and North Korea, and perhaps repairing relations with Europe, a long list which leaves little time for Russia. A major review of his Russia policy is not likely to be high on Bush's agenda. At the same time, the president can no longer pretend that his personal ties with Putin are a substitute for an effective American policy for dealing with Russia and especially Russia's autocratic drift. In the long run, Bush's failure to develop a new and more strategic policy toward Russia

could create serious problems for American national security interests — i.e., a nationalist leader in the Kremlin with anti-Western foreign policy interests empowered by a thriving economy, a state-owned oil and gas conglomerate with tentacles deep into Europe, and a revamped Russian state and military with imperial ambitions. Fortunately, the probability of this outcome is still small; now is the time to ensure that it remains so.

The most effective strategy for Bush's new foreign policy team to help slow Russia's democratic deterioration is not isolation, containment, or confrontation, but rather deeper engagement with both the Russian government and Russian society. The United States does not have enough leverage over Russia to influence internal change through coercive means. Only a strategy of linkage is available. However paradoxical, a more substantive agenda at the state-to-state level would create more permissive conditions for greater Western engagement with Russian society. A new American policy toward Russia must pursue both — a more ambitious bilateral relationship in conjunction with a more long-term strategy for strengthening Russian civil, political, and economic societies, which ultimately will be the critical forces that push Russia back onto a democratizing path.

Russia's democratic rollback

When Bush and Putin first met in Slovenia in June 2001, Bush was not alone in downplaying Putin's antidemocratic acts at home. At the time, many observers of Russian affairs inside and outside of the Bush administration believed that Putin's positive achievements outweighed his negative steps. Putin was presiding over Russia's most substantial economic growth since independence while also pursuing several economic reforms — such as a new tax and land code — that had languished for years under President Boris Yeltsin. In foreign affairs, Putin was striking a pragmatic pose, cooperating with almost everyone on something. At home, Putin's battles with Chechens and oligarchs (some of whom controlled major media holdings) were justified as necessary steps toward righting the wrongs of the chaotic Yeltsin years.

Moreover, at the beginning of Bush's (and Putin's) first term, conventional wisdom on Russia posited that Putin was too weak and too constrained to change qualitatively the nature of the political regime. Business interests, governors, and Yeltsin holdovers still working in the Kremlin would keep the inexperienced Putin in check. In addition, many argued that Putin could not undermine democracy in Russia because by 1999 there was nothing left to undermine. For some, nearly ten years of Yeltsin's rule had destroyed the achievements of Russia's democratic breakthrough following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For others, hundreds of years of autocratic culture were most enduring, and a "strongman" like Putin therefore represented continuity, not a disruption, with Russia's past.

Five years later, while some cling to the idea that nothing is new in the way Russia is ruled, most observers are impressed by how much the regime has changed. The Russian state remains corrupt and inefficient, and Putin himself is in many ways an indecisive or

ineffective leader. The regime he heads today is more stable but far less pluralistic and more centralized than the one he inherited in 2000.

First of all, there is Putin's indifference to human rights, most grotesquely on display in Chechnya. When Chechen terrorist Shamil Basayev invaded neighboring Dagestan in 1999 to liberate the Muslim people of the Caucasus, President Yeltsin and his new prime minister, Vladimir Putin, had to respond to defend Russia's borders. But the response was not limited to expelling the terrorist attackers in Dagestan. Rather, Putin used the crisis as a pretext for trying to tame Chechnya once and for all through the use of force. To date, he has not succeeded. More than 100,000 people in Chechnya have died, but terrorist attacks against Russians have continued, including the horrific attack against the schoolhouse in Beslan in September 2004. As Putin fails, both Russian military forces and their enemies in Chechnya have blatantly abused the human rights of Russian citizens in the region.

Second, Putin and his government initiated a series of successful campaigns against independent media outlets. When Putin came to power, only three networks had the national reach to really count in politics — ort, rtr, and ntv. By running billionaire Boris Berezovsky out of the country, Putin effectively acquired control of ort, the channel with the biggest national audience. rtr was always fully state-owned, and so it was even easier to tame. Controlling the third channel, ntv, proved more difficult, since its owner, Vladimir Gusinsky, decided to fight. But in the end, he, too, lost — not only ntv but also the daily newspaper Segodnya and the weekly Itogi — when prosecutors pressed charges. ntv's original team of journalists tried to make a go of it at two other stations but eventually failed. Under control of those closely tied to the Kremlin, the old ntv has gradually come to resemble the other two national television networks. In 2005, Anatoly Chubais, the ceo of United Energy Systems (ues) and a leader in the liberal party Union of Right Forces (sps), was compelled to sell his much smaller private television company, ren tv, to more Kremlin-friendly oligarchs, even though Chubais could never be considered a fierce critic of the president.

In response to the inept performance of Russia's security forces in the Beslan standoff in the summer of 2004, the print media showed signs of revival. But when the Izvestia newspaper did try to ask questions about the state's failures, the newspaper's editor was promptly fired.

The independence of electronic media also has eroded on the regional level. Heads of local state-owned television stations continue to follow political signals from regional executives, and most regional heads of administration stood firmly behind Putin in the last electoral cycle. Dozens of newspapers and Web portals have remained independent and offer a platform for political figures of all persuasions, but none of these platforms enjoys mass audiences. More generally, Putin has changed the atmosphere for doing journalistic work. His most vocal media critics have lost their jobs, have been harassed by the tax authorities or by sham lawsuits, or have been arrested. To keep their jobs, others now practice self-censorship.

Mysteriously, several journalists have been killed during the Putin era, including even one American reporter, Paul Klebnikov. In its third annual worldwide press-freedom index in 2004, Reporters Without Borders placed Russia 140 out of 167 countries assessed.¹

A third important political change carried out on Putin's watch was "regional reforms." Almost immediately after becoming president in 2000, Putin made reining in Russia's regional executives a top priority. He began his campaign to reassert Moscow's authority by establishing seven supra-regional districts headed primarily by former generals and kgb officers. These new super-governors were assigned the task of taking control of all federal agencies in their jurisdictions, many of which had developed affinities, if not loyalties, to regional governments during the Yeltsin era. These seven representatives of federal executive authority also investigated governors and presidents of republics as a way of undermining their autonomy and threatening them into subjugation. Putin also emasculated the Federation Council, the upper house of Russia's parliament, by removing governors and heads of regional legislatures from this chamber and replacing them with appointed representatives from the regional executive and legislative branches of government. Regional leaders who have resisted Putin's authority have found elections rigged against them. In the most recent gubernatorial elections in the Kursk, Saratov, and Rostov oblasts, as well as in the presidential races in Chechnya (twice) and Ingushetiya, the removal of the strongest contenders ensured an outcome favorable to the Kremlin. In September 2004, in a final blow to Russian federalism, Putin announced his plan to appoint governors. He justified the move as a means of making regional authorities more accountable and more effective, yet the overwhelming majority of the nearly 40 newly appointed governors have been the old governors in place before.

Fourth, in December 2003, Putin made real progress in weakening the autonomy of one more institution of Russia's democratic system — the parliament. After the 1999 parliamentary election, Putin enjoyed a majority of support within the Duma. To make the Duma more compliant, he and his administration took advantage of earlier successes in acquiring control of other political resources (such as ntv and the backing of governors) to achieve a smashing electoral victory for the Kremlin's party, United Russia, in the December 2003 parliamentary election. United Russia and its allies in the parliament now control two-thirds of the seats in parliament. In achieving this outcome, the Kremlin's greatest asset was Putin's own popularity, which hovered around 70 percent during the fall 2003 campaign. Constant, positive coverage of United Russia leaders (and negative coverage of Communist Party officials) on all of Russia's national television stations, overwhelming financial support from Russia's oligarchs, and near-unanimous endorsement from Russia's regional leaders also contributed to United Russia's success. For the first time ever, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (osce) issued a critical preliminary report on Russia's 1999 parliamentary election, which stressed that "the State Duma elections failed to meet many osce and Council of Europe commitments for democratic elections."²

Fifth, Putin and his regime demonstrated a blatant disregard for property rights and the institutions that protect them when they renationalized and then redistributed the most

important assets of Yukos, formerly Russia's largest oil company. Russian authorities first arrested Yukos ceo Mikhail Khodorkovsky, then saddled the company with billions of dollars in back taxes, and then sold its most profitable asset, Yuganskneftegaz, to a state-owned company, Rosneft — whose chairman of the board, Igor Sechin, is also a chief aide to Putin. Andrei Illarionov, Putin's own economic advisor, called the sale of Yuganskneftegaz the "scam of the year."³

Finally, Putin has even decided that non-governmental organizations (ngos) are a threat to his power. By enforcing draconian registration procedures and tax laws, Putin's administration has forced many ngos critical of the Kremlin to close. To force independent ngos to the margins of society, the Kremlin has devoted massive resources to the creation of stated-sponsored and state-controlled ngos. In his 2004 annual address to the Federation Assembly, Putin struck a xenophobic note when he argued that "not all of the organizations are oriented towards standing up for people's real interests. For some of them, the priority is to receive financing from influential foreign foundations."⁴ Subsequently, pro-Kremlin members of parliament have introduced legislation that would tighten state control over the distribution of grants from foreign donors. Nor are Western ngos immune from Russian state harassment. Putin's government has tossed out the Peace Corps, closed down the osce's office in Chechnya, declared persona non grata the afl-cio's field representative in Moscow, and raided the offices of the Soros Foundation.

When observed in isolation, each one of these steps in Putin's plan can be interpreted as something other than democratic backsliding. The government in Chechnya did not work; terrorists did and do reside there. Some of the regional barons whom Putin has reined in actually behaved as tyrants in their own fiefdoms. Khodorkovsky is no Sakharov. What president in the world does not want to enjoy a parliamentary majority? And, more generally, everyone believes that Russia needs a more effective state to develop both markets and democracy. But when analyzed together, the thread uniting these events is clear — the elimination or weakening of independent sources of power.

Putin's more autocratic regime has not made the Russian state more effective. During his rule, the provision of public goods has not increased significantly (though next year's budget does plan for increased spending in education and social welfare), terrorist attacks have not abated, and corruption has skyrocketed from \$34 billion spent on bribes by Russian businesses in 2001 to \$316 billion in 2005.⁵

Does Russia really matter?

The slide toward autocracy has dampened Western enthusiasm for trying to deepen cooperation with Russia or to integrate Russia into Western multilateral institutions. For more than 15 years, first Soviet and then Russian integration was a goal shared between Russian and Western leaders, but this is no longer necessarily the case. The referendum votes in France and the Netherlands against the European Union Constitutional Treaty have compelled leaders in Europe to turn inward and resolve their own internal crises of

integration. They do not have the will or popular support to foster Ukrainian membership, even after the Orange Revolution, let alone to think about Russia as a possible member. In the United States, American foreign policy priorities shifted radically after September 11, relegating relations with Russia to a tertiary position. In Russia, inflated and disappointed expectations about the rewards of cooperation with the United States and Europe also have undermined the integration project. Putin wants to maintain cordial relations with all strategic countries in the West, but his main focus is strengthening the Russian state, not integrating it into the West.

Given this constellation of centrifugal forces, some analysts in Washington argue that disengagement is the most prudent foreign policy strategy for the United States. In its most benign form, this line of reasoning underscores the fact that Russia is no longer a great power, and thus can be ignored. Hardnosed realists argue that Russia's autocratic turn, while unfortunate for the people of Russia, does not affect American national security interests. Russia has become so weak over the past two decades, the argument goes, that it can no longer act in the world as an effective power either in cooperating with or in threatening the United States. A more assertive strain of this same argument calls for aggressive containment of Russian power, however weak, so that Russia will not adversely influence Western institutions such as nato or states friendly to the West in the former Soviet space, such as Georgia or Ukraine.⁶

There is no question that the Russian capacity to influence American interests, either positively or negatively, has greatly diminished in the past two decades. Regarding traditional measures of power — military might, economic prowess, and population — Russia today is a shadow of the Soviet Union. Its ability to project military force is extremely limited, its military infrastructure is decayed, and its armed forces are in need of radical reform. After a decade of dramatic decline, the economy began to grow steadily after 1999, but Russia will remain a middle-income country at best for decades to come. Russia's population hovers below 150 million and is rapidly declining.

At the same time, it has enough power and potential power to be either a spoiler or a contributing partner as America pursues its national security interests. For instance, Russia inherited and maintains military and economic ties with Iran, Syria, North Korea, and China, relations that could be either useful or threatening to American security interests. Moreover, Russia is the world's largest producer and exporter of hydrocarbons, an endowment which could also either serve or impede American strategic interests, depending on whether leaders in the Kremlin are cooperative or hostile to the United States. Armed still with thousands of nuclear weapons and intercontinental delivery vehicles, Russia remains the only country in the world still capable of annihilating the American homeland. It is hard to imagine how Russian leaders could ever use this kind of power in either a positive or a threatening way. Yet, if controlled by leaders with genuinely imperial or anti-American intentions, Russia's nuclear arsenal could again become a tool of blackmail against the United States and its allies.

Today, Russian state weakness itself also threatens American national security. U.S. policymakers must worry about the possibility of nuclear technologies and weapons

being stolen or sold on the world black market. The Russian state's inability to construct an effective early-warning radar system increases the likelihood of an accidental ballistic missile launch in response to faulty information. Russia's inability to defend its borders in the Caucasus has opened a new front on the global war on terror.

Nonetheless, a more effective Russian state would serve American national interests only if Russian presidents had to consult with other Russian institutions and the will of the people before deploying this new capacity. A powerful state in the hands of Kremlin leaders unconstrained by democratic institutions and motivated by imperial ambitions and anti-Western proclivities is our worst nightmare. In fact, we lived through such an experience during the twentieth century. Nurturing the development of a stronger state in Russia, therefore, should be pursued only in conjunction with fostering the development of a democratic regime as well.

The establishment of a consolidated democratic regime in Russia would not eliminate all tensions in U.S.-Russian relations. Leaders of a democratic Russia would still try to assist Russian companies when their interests clashed with American companies. A democratic Russia would still try to sell arms abroad to the highest bidder. A democratic Russia, like democratic France and Germany, would have opposed the American-led invasion of Iraq.

This said, some recent conflicts in U.S.-Russian relations do seem to be the byproduct of the autocratic nature of the Russian regime. In formulating foreign policy, Putin does not have to consult liberal political parties, governors, most Russian multinational corporations, or the Russian people. Instead, the armed forces, the intelligence services, and the military-industrial complex are the constituencies that matter, and this set of interest groups has a narrower anti-American approach to foreign policy than Russian society more generally. For instance, 75 percent of Russian voters want Russia to be an ally or friend of the West, only 17 percent think that the West should be treated as a rival, and less than 3 percent think that the West is an enemy of Russia.⁷ Judging by their anti-American statements and Cold War rhetoric, senior decision-makers in Russia's military and intelligence services maintain a more skeptical approach toward Western intentions. These are the voices that defined Ukraine's presidential election as a geopolitical contest between East and West, claim the former Soviet Union as Russia's sphere of influence, blamed Beslan on Western meddling, see the United States as an imperial hegemon seeking to encircle Russia, and embrace China — demonstrated most dramatically in summer 2005 by the first joint military exercise between Russian and Chinese armed forces — as a partner in balancing against American power. Not surprisingly, this same group remains largely indifferent to Cooperative Threat Reduction, has pushed successfully to maintain sales of Russian nuclear technology to Iran, has succeeded in selling more sophisticated arms to China (and before the American invasion also to Iraq), and most recently has begun to question the value of Russia's membership in European institutions such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (osce).

Public attitudes and the preferences of siloviki (the Russian word used to refer to this group of hardliners) also diverge on Chechnya. While a solid majority of Russian citizens

prefers negotiations over force as a policy for dealing with Chechnya, Putin, the military, and the Federal Security Service (the fsb, the main successor organization to the kgb) obviously disagree. More generally, every major public opinion poll shows strong support in Russia for democratic institutions and democratic values, even if they also still show solid support for Putin as a leader. In other words, Russian society may not be resisting authoritarian changes in Russia's political system, but society is also not demanding these autocratic changes. Those more radically authoritarian and anti-Western than Putin will come to power in Russia only by undemocratic means, or, put more positively, the restoration of democratic institutions in Russia would prevent an extremist, nationalist, anti-Western leader from coming to power.

But such a political system no longer exists in Russia. Putin's weakening of independent institutions and autonomous political groups has created a political system which, in the wrong hands, could easily morph into a full-fledged repressive autocratic regime. Leaders of such a regime would rely even more heavily on the "guys with guns" to stay in power, and it is these guys with guns who hold foreign policy views most antithetical to American interests. Today, the most unhelpful Russian policies on Iran, Chechnya, Russia's neighbors, and the Russian economy are all carried out by the most retrograde individuals and agencies in the Russian government. The more power these forces obtain, the more difficult U.S.-Russian relations will become.

The good news is that Putin is not a dictator and Russia today is not a full-blown dictatorship in the hands of a militant nationalist, but rather a competitive autocratic regime headed by a ruthless but pragmatic state builder. Putin's presence in the Kremlin means that cooperation remains possible on the most important strategic issues in the U.S.-Russian relationship. Russia may not have the pro-Western orientation that the Soviet Union had under Mikhail Gorbachev or Russia had under Boris Yeltsin, but nor does it have the kind of anti-Western policies of Communist leaders like Josef Stalin and Nikita Khrushchev. The Russian leadership is best described today as non-Western. President Putin's government is not seeking to get on a path toward democratization and integration in Western institutions like nato and the European Union. He has sought to maintain cordial ties with Europe and China while at the same time seeking economic gain for Russian companies in places like Iran. His primary foreign policy objective is to restore Russian influence in the former Soviet space, a policy that, though not relying on military means, can still be quite disturbing — as with the Ukrainian presidential elections or the support for Uzbek President Islam Karimov after his government brutally gunned down hundreds of innocent civilians in Andijon in May 2005. Even while he pursues some policies that run counter to American interests, Putin wants good, stable relations with the West, and this keeps alive the possibility of engagement with both the Russian state and society.

Dual-track diplomacy

At a time when Russia is intermittently ratcheting up the Cold War rhetoric, offering little on foreign policy issues of most concern, and heading in an increasingly authoritarian direction at home, what is most needed in Washington is a new version of the dual-track strategy Ronald Reagan pursued after 1982: offering serious cooperation on strategic matters while at the same time standing up for America's democratic principles — principles President Bush has eloquently elaborated in discussing other parts of the world — and engaging directly with Russian society to help foster democratic development.⁸ The president needs to send strong signals that the United States seeks to promote both economic and political reform in Ukraine and the Caucasus and their eventual integration into Western institutions — not to isolate or humiliate Russia, but because that is the only long-term strategy for achieving stability in the region. Pursuing arms control while simultaneously pressing our democratic values is not easy, but it was successful in the 1980s, and it can be successful again.

Denuclearization, Nonproliferation, and Counterproliferation. To pursue a dual-track strategy, the Bush administration should move to offer Putin a real agenda of mutual benefit to the United States and Russia. The U.S.-Russia relationship is in desperate need of a new, grand, and cooperative initiative. The logical place to start is in the nuclear sphere.

Accelerating the dismantlement of nuclear weapons, perhaps even with the aid of a new treaty, would be one way to generate a new atmosphere of cooperation between Russia and the United States and help the U. S. in its quest to discourage proliferation of nuclear weapons worldwide. A treaty that defined rules for counting warheads, specified a timetable for dismantlement, included robust verification procedures, made cuts permanent, and did not allow demobilized weapons to be put in storage (as is now the practice under the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty signed in Moscow in 2002) would send a message to the world that the United States is serious about meeting its obligations specified in Article 6 of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (npt).

Similarly, President Bush could propose to Putin a new bilateral agreement pledging to discontinue research and development of new nuclear weapons. Neither the United States nor Russia needs to develop “mini-nukes” or bunker-busting nuclear weapons, since the deployment of such systems would increase, however slightly, the probability of using nuclear weapons.

The administration should also move quickly to expand and accelerate Cooperative Threat Reduction (ctr). Of course, metrics for measuring success must be made clear, and information about progress in meeting these goals must be made more readily available. The lack of access to storage facilities operated by the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Agency for Atomic Energy (formerly the Ministry of Atomic Energy, Minatom) has been a real impediment to the deeper development of the Nunn-Lugar program for the safe and secure dismantlement of nuclear weapons. In the summer of 2005, following on the heels of discussions held by Bush and Putin in February at their Bratislava summit, the Russian government offered the United States a small number of opportunities to inspect sites, a step hailed by Senator Lugar on his trip to Russia in August 2005. To

expand these opportunities further, American officials could lessen Russian suspicions about American intentions in seeking greater access by giving Russian officials greater access to American storage facilities. The more transparency, the better. Special new emphasis should be placed on the removal of highly enriched uranium from Russian naval systems scheduled for dismantlement.

Both countries should also sign a more robust and verifiable Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. If this new treaty is going to have any chance at success, the current American proposal to limit verification procedures — growing out of the Bush administration's reluctance to have an international organization carrying out on-site inspections of American facilities — should be reversed. Russian and American officials also must take the lead in establishing a new protocol to the npt forbidding the acquisition of a closed fuel cycle by any nonnuclear country seeking to develop nuclear power capabilities.

Finally, more than a decade after the end of the Cold War, it is simply absurd that American and Russian nuclear forces remain on hair-trigger alert. This practice must be stopped immediately.

Trade. In addition to nuclear cooperation, the Bush administration should offer a new course in the trade sphere. No act would buy the president greater goodwill among Russian state officials and society at large than Russia's graduation from the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act of 1974. Jackson-Vanik rightly denied most favored nation status to the Soviet Union because of its restrictive emigration practices. Certainly some of the human rights problems that Senator Jackson and Congressman Vanik wanted to address in 1974 remain, but Jackson-Vanik no longer addresses these new strains of infringement. It is time for Congress to graduate Russia from Jackson-Vanik and thereby allow Russia to obtain permanent normal trading status with the United States even before Russia joins the World Trade Organization.

As a way to get the legislation passed and send the right signals about democracy to human rights activists inside Russia, the Bush administration should work with congressional leaders to initiate legislation to deal with new forms of human rights abuses in Russia today. Specifically, the president should urge Congress to provide new resources to the Jackson Foundation, a nonprofit organization established with seed money from Congress to continue Jackson's agenda of promoting human rights and religious freedoms in the Soviet Union and Russia. A better-funded Jackson Foundation could make direct grants to those activists and organizations in Russia that are still dedicated to the original principles outlined in the 1974 legislation.

Securing Russian Cooperation on America's Security Agenda. On several fronts, the United States needs to get greater cooperation from President Putin than he has offered to date. The most pressing issue is Iran's nuclear program. If it goes forward, it will dramatically destabilize the broader Middle East and may compel states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia to pursue nuclear weapons of their own, in addition to complicating relations with the new government of Iraq. The Bush administration needs Russia's support for a unified international approach to the Iranian crisis at a time when

negotiations between the eu-3 (Britain, France, and Germany) and Iran have broken down and the eu-3 may support referring the problem to the un Security Council for sanctions. Russia has given rhetorical support for the work being done by the eu-3, but it needs to do more. Until a new international agreement is reached with Iran, Putin should pull out of Iran all Russian nuclear scientists and advisors at Bushehr and halt any further transfer of nuclear technology or nuclear fuel.

In the event that Russia continues to provide support for Iranian nuclear reactors, the United States should seek greater international oversight over the spent-fuel agreement Moscow and Tehran have forged. Iran has agreed to send the spent fuel from the Bushehr reactor to Russia so that this material is unavailable for reprocessing to produce weapons-grade plutonium. But what if Iran reneges on the deal after the reactor is completed? The Bush administration should seek Russian agreement for international oversight of the spent-fuel arrangement.

Of equal significance is U.S.-Russian cooperation in fighting terrorist organizations. American and Russian cooperation in defeating the Taliban in Afghanistan was real and tangible. U.S. and Russian officials hint that they continue to share and exchange intelligence about international terrorist groups, and the nato-Russia Council established in 2002 has engaged in discussions about how to develop military cooperation in this area. The Russian intelligence community, as well as Moscow's policy and academic communities, have unique experiences with and insights about the greater Middle East from which their counterparts in the United States can learn.

Unfortunately, however, the Russian battle against secessionists has been portrayed as part of the larger global war on terror. While al Qaeda has long played an active role in supporting the secessionists, Russia's fight and America's are not the same. More munitions have been used in the past ten years in Chechnya than on any European city since World War ii. Indiscriminate violence against civilians has been the norm, which in turn has strengthened extremist ideologues and weakened moderate nationalists inside Chechnya. This current Russian strategy toward Chechnya does not serve American national security interests.

The heavy-handed Russian approach during the Ukrainian presidential elections highlights the challenges for American interests in Eurasia. U.S. policy since the end of 1991 has been to support the territorial integrity and political independence of all the former republics of the extinct Soviet Union. Baltic membership in nato and the eu has secured those countries' futures, but those countries beyond nato's reach still face threats from Russia. Russian support for separatists in Moldova and Georgia is extremely destabilizing. Ukraine's future course is vitally important for signaling what is and is not possible in the former Soviet Union. If Ukraine is not successful in developing more significant partnerships with nato and the eu, the divide between those countries of Central and Eastern Europe that integrated into Europe and those of the non-Baltic former Soviet Union that did not will threaten what has been achieved since the end of the Cold War.

The essence of a new approach would be to internationalize conflicts in the region, and especially in Georgia and Moldova. The Russians cannot be the only peacekeeping forces involved. Ideally, the United Nations (including Russia) would endorse new multilateral deployments, and the OSCE would take the lead in organizing a multinational peacekeeping force. The negotiation processes must also be internationalized. Georgian officials, for instance, can sit down at the negotiating table with their Russian counterparts only if Americans and Europeans are also seated there.

Finally, there is oil. Russia not only is the world's largest exporter of oil and gas, but also still has one of the world's largest oil reserve bases and owns 30 percent of the world's proven gas reserves. Managing Russia's growing presence in these markets will be a major strategic challenge for the United States for the coming decades. Assisting American direct foreign investment in Russia, resisting greater state ownership of these resources, and increasing the number of pipelines available to ship them are strategic American objectives which can be pursued only through a cooperative relationship with the Kremlin.

Reengaging Russian Society. The development of a more comprehensive relationship with the Russian government does not mean that U.S. officials must endorse Putin's autocratic ways or refrain from discussing and promoting democratic values within Russian society. There need not be a tradeoff between these two policy directions. Putin and his government will cooperate with their counterparts in Washington if and only if they see such engagement as advancing their definition of Russia's national interest. They will not disrupt such beneficial cooperation between governments in response to American efforts to engage Russian society. Therefore, in addition to reinvigorating the state-to-state agenda with the Kremlin, American officials must rededicate their efforts to promoting the unfinished business of Russian democratization.

The battle for democracy within Russia will be won or lost largely by internal forces. At the margins, however, the United States can help to tilt the balance in favor of those who support freedom. In seeking to influence economic and political developments inside Russia, the United States has few coercive tools available. Comprehensive, sustained, and meaningful engagement of all elements of Russian society, therefore, must be the strategy.

A new policy of aiding Russian democracy begins by speaking the truth about democratic erosion under Putin. Just weeks before assuming her responsibilities as national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice wrote about the deleterious consequences of not speaking honestly about Russia's internal problems: "The United States should not be faulted for trying to help. But, as the Russian reformer Grigori Yavlinsky has said, the United States should have 'told the truth' about what was happening [inside his country]."9 She then attacked "the 'happy talk' in which the Clinton administration engaged." Rice's message is even truer today. Words matter. Yavlinsky and other defenders of democracy inside Russia still want U.S. officials to tell the truth.

Direct personal engagement with Russian democratic activists also matters. When Ronald Reagan traveled to the Soviet Union in May 1988, he discussed arms control and regional conflicts with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. But Reagan did not let his friendship and cooperation with Gorbachev overshadow his other chief concern while in town — human rights. Speaking in Helsinki the day before entering the Soviet Union for the first time, Reagan proclaimed that “There is no true international security without respect for human rights. . . . The greatest creative and moral force in this world, the greatest hope for survival and success, for peace and happiness, is human freedom.” During his stay in the Soviet capital, Reagan echoed this theme in action and words many times, whether in his speech to students at Moscow State University or at a luncheon with nearly 100 human rights activists at the American ambassador’s residence. Reagan did not simply show up for a photo-op with these enemies of the Soviet dictatorship. He accorded these human rights activists the same respect that he showed for his Soviet counterpart. President Bush, Secretary Rice, and other high-profile American officials must adopt a similar strategy of using meetings with Russian democratic and human-rights activists to elevate attention to their cause and help protect these brave people from further harassment by the Russian government.

Material support also can make a difference. At a time when Russian democracy is eroding, some Bush administration officials have begun to discuss the timetable for Russia’s “graduation” from American-funded democracy programs. In every budget request since coming to power, the Bush administration has cut funding to the freedom Support Act (fsa) for the region as a whole and Russia in particular. Between 2002 and 2004, funding for fsa fell from \$958 million to \$548 million, while funding for Russia’s portion of this support fell from \$162 million in 2002 to \$96 million in 2004 (which, as the result of wisdom on Capitol Hill, was significantly more than the \$73 million originally requested by the Bush administration) and dropped still further in 2005. The Bush Administration’s fy 2006 freedom Support Act request for Russia is a mere \$48 million.

The administration argues that Russia’s economic growth allows for cuts in some of the economic programs and that the portion of the funds geared toward democracy promotion is not being targeted to the same extent. But the funds for democracy promotion should be increased. Not only is the job of democracy building in Russia incomplete; it is becoming more difficult. Moreover, if the United States abandons democratic activists in Russia now — well before democracy has taken root — what signal will this send about American staying power to democratic leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan? This assistance should also be more focused, targeted to those actors and organizations directly fighting to preserve democratic practices. For instance, now is the time to give more technical and financial support to independent media, electoral monitoring organizations, social policy campaigns, public-interest law firms, anti-corruption watchdog groups, and youth movements. At a time when party politics are devoid of debate about policies, support for issue-based campaigns targeted to promote children’s rights and students’ rights or to address citizens’ concerns about the human and financial costs of the war in Chechnya are especially important. Above all else, Western organizations involved in promoting democracy in Russia must recognize the new political context inside Russia which has

evolved under Putin and not continue to implement the same programs they followed a decade ago.

Cutting funding for exchange programs and scholarships is also dangerously short-sighted, since it is this first post-communist generation — that is, those who came of age well after the Soviet Union had collapsed — who will determine Russia's long-term political trajectory. These Russian students are America's natural allies in developing democracy within Russia. Moreover, the United States has no greater asset for promoting democracy than the example of our own society.

In addition, the United States should devote greater resources to developing higher education within Russia, with special emphasis on establishing public-policy schools and the development of political science as a discipline. Russia now boasts several topnotch business schools, as well as first-rate departments of economics. Russian students have many options available to them if they want to learn about market institutions, but the same cannot be said about the study of democratic institutions. Subsidizing internet access inside Russia is another powerful tool for promoting democracy within Russia and integrating Russian society into the West.

Focus on 2008. The 2008 Russian presidential election is the next momentous event in Russian politics and last critical milestone in U.S.-Russian relations for the Bush administration. Until that election, Putin's regime is stable. Falling prices, a new major terrorist attack, or another "color" revolution in the region will not derail the current government in power. The process by which Putin decides to navigate the scheduled presidential election in 2008, therefore, is critical. If he steps down after his second term as the constitution calls for him to do, then Russian democracy has a chance for renewal. Even if Putin's chosen successor wins, a competitive presidential election that has occurred on time and under law will help to institutionalize this method for choosing Russia's leaders and raise the stakes for transgressing the constitution for aspiring autocrats in the future. If, however, Putin decides to change or violate the constitution in order to stay in power, he will undermine his own legitimacy, since solid majorities in Russia believe that their leaders should be elected.

President Bush and his administration can do very little to revitalize democratic institutions weakened by Putin's rule over the past five years. Bush cannot establish independent television in Russia, bring back to life Russia's independent political parties, or stop the war in Chechnya. However, he can use his personal influence with Putin to help convince the Russian president of the advantages of retirement in 2008. Through private communications, Bush can explain that a peaceful, democratic transition of power in 2008 would cement Putin's historical legacy as state-builder (however unjustified from our perspective), while clinging to power beyond his second term would make Putin look like a typical autocratic thug. Privately, Bush should also lobby his friend Vladimir to increase the fairness and transparency of the 2008 election. A first and easy step for Bush to recommend to Putin is that he propose an amendment to the current election laws that would allow Russian nongovernmental organizations to monitor these elections.

In parallel to this private campaign with Putin, Bush and his government must also focus attention and greater resources on those Russian societal actors dedicated to making the 2007 parliamentary election and the 2008 presidential election free and fair. In particular, American funding sources must provide Russian election monitoring organizations with the means to place their people at all or most polls, to conduct parallel vote tabulations (pvt), and to carry out national exit polls. Programs that strengthen independent media, get-out-the-vote activities, and voter education must also be given maximum support over the next three years.

A principled policy

The United States does not have the power to reverse anti-democratic trends inside Russia. Russia is too big, and Putin is too powerful. But U.S. officials must make clear on which side of the fence America stands. In reflecting on the Cold War era in Europe and Asia in a speech at the National Endowment for Democracy (November 6, 2003), Bush stated, “[W]e provided inspiration for oppressed peoples. In prison camps, in banned union meetings, in clandestine churches, men and women knew that the whole world was not sharing their own nightmare. They knew of at least one place — a bright and hopeful land — where freedom was valued and secure. And they prayed that America would not forget them, or forget the mission to promote liberty around the world.” Democrats in Russia are still hoping that we do not forget them and do not abandon our mission to promote liberty everywhere in the world, including Russia. Engaging both state and society is the task for American policymakers.

Notes

1 Reporters Without Borders, “Third Annual Worldwide Press Freedom Index,” available at http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=11715.

2 “Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Russian Federation State Duma Elections, 7 December 2003” (Vienna: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Parliamentary Assembly, International Election Observation Mission, December 2003), available at http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2003/12/1629_en.pdf.

3 Arkady Ostrovsky, “Yukos asset called ‘scam of the year’,” *Financial Times* (September 29, 2004).

4 Vladimir Putin, “Address to the Federal Assembly of the Federation” (Moscow, May 26, 2004).

5 The Russian think tank Indem Foundation has used surveys of Russian firms to make these calculations, quoted here in Steven Myers, “Pervasive Corruption in Russia Is ‘Just Called Business’,” *New York Times* (August 13, 2005).

6 In Moscow, a version of this same argument circulates widely among foreign policy elites, who call for balancing against American power worldwide, checking American influence in what they call the “near abroad,” and eliminating American “intervention” in Russia’s internal affairs.

7 These numbers are from surveys commissioned by Timothy Colton, Henry Hale, and Michael McFaul in spring 2004 and conducted by DEMOSCOPE.

8 See George Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: Diplomacy, Power, and the Victory of the American Ideal* (Simon & Schuster, 1993), chapter 18.

9 Condoleezza Rice, “Exercising Power Without Arrogance,” *Chicago Tribune* (December 31, 2000).