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## Putin's Russia Rapprochement with the West: Tactical ploy or Strategic Choice ( 2000-2002)

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The switchover to the new millenium has inspired considerable discourse on the subject of "Russia at the Crossroads of History". Unlike any other country, Russia has had an ongoing interest for this topic throughout its history and especially over the last three centuries. Basically, we are dealing here with a long-standing, continual 'crossroads' at which Russia is trying in exasperation to resolve the problem of its geographical, historical and metaphysical self-identification – is Russia part of Europe or not?

This teenage complex of attractiorn and defiance which represents the archetype of the Russian political frame of mind, resurfaced on the pages of dozens of publications produced by our foreign-political community in the course of the past few years, bearing on the problem of Russia-NATO relations and on Russia and the West.

"We are part of Europe, yet Europe is shoving us out of Europe"; "We should like to have a strategic partnership with the West, but we are being rejected"; "They do not believe in our desire for peace and friendship and regard our good will as a weakness", and so forth. Similar passages conjured in various tones of incoherent prose remind one of the primary ideas behind a classic poem written more than eighty years ago.

*Come hither, to us! Come away  
From the horrors of war into our warm embrace.  
Should you not, we have nothing to lose  
And treachery is open to us, as well...  
Whilst groping through the barren lands and brush  
Of dearest Europe, we shall  
Retreat. We shall turn on you  
Our Asian mug ! ( A. Bloc." Scythians").*

There have been even more than enough practical recommendations of "turning our Asian mug towards Europe" - strategic partnership with China, "equipping our armed forces again with tactical nuclear weapons", and supplying "anti-imperialist regimes" with nuclear weapons technology and the means for their delivery.

The Russian political "elite" excessively emotional reaction to the prospect of NATO enlargement, and the boisterous, unanimous, but senseless "no" coming

from Moscow couldn't be explained by the degree of these or those real or imagined threats to Russia's security.

The eastward expansion of NATO, or, more precisely, the Eastern and Central European states' escape to the West, has disturbed the very roots of our political consciousness. It has revived a dispute that has never actually disappeared from the depths of our culture, that is, whether Russia is a part of Europe, reminding us, thus, that in many ways it is not. Albeit, not because anyone is forcing us out of Europe, but because we, ourselves, have still not resolved this tormenting question, due to some specific features of our history, our geography, national psychology, and so on.

People like Chadayev, Solovyov and Ilyin (Russian philosophers of 19-20 centuries) in Central Europe, never asked themselves such a question, that is, whether their countries and nations belong to Europe or not. For them, the answer to this question has always been obvious. It is no wonder, therefore, that these countries were very much inclined to benefit from the opportunity that has finally been afforded to them to confirm their geopolitical choice and establish their membership in the prestigious structures of Europe.

Such a flight would not have become a focal event in Russia-West relations had the Russian political 'elite', stirred by its deserted-lover complex, not started its heroic struggle against NATO enlargement. Like any other neurotic, it camouflaged its irrational complexes with pseudo-national nonsense about "the shorter time NATO airplanes carrying nuclear warheads need to reach their destination if they take off from Polish or even worse Latvian airfields".

Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary had, of course, joined NATO. Two years had passed. The Polish president came to Moscow. For some reason, no one mentioned the time of the takeoff of his flight. But, his host at the Kremlin noted with satisfaction that, Russian-Polish relations, that had historically their ups and downs, in the last two years began taking an ascending line. Indeed, precisely after Poland's admission to NATO, This is not surprising. Having finally confirmed its European choice in its own eyes, Poland has, at long last, freed itself of its historical Russian complex.

Here in Russia, this clearly protracted controversy over whether we belong in Europe continues unabatedly. Questions pertaining to internal and foreign policies, alike, are its inseparable parts. Regardless of whether the destiny of democratic institutions in the country are in question or Russia's relations with the outside world - the West in the first place - the crux of the matter is the same in both instances, namely, the fundamental values of Russian society. By "turning our Asian mug" to the West, the authorities are inevitably doing likewise vis-a-vis its own people.

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The age-long struggle of «westerners» and «Eurasians» further burdened now by the painful complex over losing the global cold war with the West, is now continuing in the domain of Russia's culture. With the new president at the helm of the State, the pendulum has initially again moved, it seemed, to the side of Eurasianism. This need not be taken as his personal merit. One might sooner remark that the rising to power of a person with such a biography and mentality, objectively reflected the predominant disposition within the Russian 'political elite'.

In the first year of Putin's presidency, our foreign policy assumed a clearly anti-American connotation. The impression created has been that the chief objective of our foreign policy is to counter the United States on all azimuths. Suffice it only to mention the extremely abusive cut off of Gore-Chernomurdin agreement on arms trade with Iran; the demonstrative visit to Cuba; endeavors

to establish anti-American coalitions with China; the launching of the evidently untruthful version about the collision of the submarine "Kursk" with an American sub, and the like, let alone the hysterically anti-American tone of our foreign political reviews.

But in the course of our fathom confrontation with the West, certain things seem to have become clearer even for the most fanatic Enrasians and the most fervent anti-Westerners.

Firstly, China is a self-sufficient state that has been moving about alone, with feline grace, unburdened by any complexes, for several millennia already, in contrast to the Russian elite; it has no need, for any kind of strategic partnership with Russia, least of all on an anti-American basis.

For China – the super-state of the 21st century – relations with the USA as its prime economic partner and political rival, are far more important than relations with Russia; thus, in establishing them, the Chinese leadership will be guided by anything rather than by the complexes of Russian politicians.

Furthermore, for Russia also, relations with the USA, the G7 and the West are more important in an even greater degree than its relations with China. On the whole, all of Russia's historical Eurasianism is, by and large, expression of its anger with the West and, for the Russian 'elite', nothing more than a psychological outlet in the critical days of its relations with the West.

All of these considerations have been brilliantly articulated in A. Bloc's famous poem. Passionate expressions of love for Europe are interspersed with threats at the minutest cause for suspicion – "And if not, we have nothing to lose, treachery is open to us as well..."

Where do China, India, our «brothers Serbs», or the North Korean dictator stand in all of this? It all constitutes nothing more than fleeting whims of the Russian elite suffering from the syndrome of maniacal depression, needed in order to justify rationally its emotionally charged relations with the "eternally despised" and "eternally beloved" West.

By the way the Chinese are perfectly aware of all this and their reaction to Russia's sporadic games is, therefore, skeptical with an undeniable dose of condescension and utter disdain. It is, of course, possible to entertain false associations for a short period of time for tactical purposes, but this is quite a tiresome business.

The events of 9.11 have sharply accelerated the process of the top Russian leadership's foreign policy maturing. At the same time, the practical tasks involved in the creation of an anti-terrorist coalition that US diplomacy has been confronted with in the wake of 11 September, have forced it to waive many of the conceptual postulates that had been pronounced in the first months of George Bush's tenure as president. It became evident that even a country as mighty as the USA is unable to ensure its own security alone. Cooperation of the most heterogeneous partners is essential, with individual forms of agreement and compromise being established in each case. Russia's significance as a foreign political partner of the USA has turned out to be substantially greater than it seemed only a few months ago, particularly in the context of military operations in Central Asia – a region in which Russia has maintained substantial potential, influence and connections. In any case, tactically, the USA has shown itself to be highly interested in constructive military-political cooperation with Russia.

President Putin provided the USA with maximum practical assistance in the pursuit of its operations in Afghanistan. It would be surprising if he were to have acted differently. This could be the first time that a situation such as this has been created in Russian history, namely, that someone else was doing the dirty

work for us. It has usually been the other way round. Were we not interested in getting rid of the terrorist lairs of Islamic radicals in our southern courtyard? Was it not just a little over a year ago that we ourselves had contemplated the possibility of bombing these terrorist camps? Have we not given up this plan because we realized that we were incapable of carrying it out effectively? Why should we then be putting spokes in the wheels of those who have taken it upon themselves to carry out this task?

Nevertheless, regardless of the president's obviously pragmatic choice, he has met with subdued disproof from a considerable segment of the Russian political 'elite'. The trauma of defeat suffered in the Cold War and the loss of its status as a superpower have grown into a deep psychological complex in the collective sub-conscience of Russia's political class that it has yet to get over.

Still, the immense responsibility which, in Russia, is traditionally heaped on the shoulders of the head of state, has not, apparently, allowed him to stay long in this phantom world of complexes and fantasies so dear to the heart of the Russian political establishment.

There is, today, in the real world, a serious military threat from the South whilst tomorrow an even more serious threat might appear from the East. Moreover, an army of poorly equipped conscripts has been left as a heritage of the superpower of the past century, most of its combat-ready units are trapped in a single rebellious province and all its doctrinal postulates are oriented towards phantom confrontation with the West.

The supreme leadership proved to be much quicker in realizing this grim geopolitical reality than the majority of the Russian establishment. The well-known politicians and generals, did much to rectify, mitigate and reverse what the president had declared as his position on the events of 9.11, viz.: "America, we are on your side."

Whilst not denying, in principal, the choice Moscow has made in favor of the anti-terrorist coalition, the "more enlightened" segment of the elite was persistently asking what "price" the West - the USA in the first place - was going to pay on account of the choice that Russia has thus made. Various "price lists", more or less along the same lines (missile defense, the expansion of NATO, debt restructuring, etc.), were being presented, and seminars and symposiums were being organized on the topic: "To what extent should America be supported?"

Such a formulation of the question lays down a false system of reference from the outset, and clearly distorts the perspective of our strategic discourse. Actually, we should focus ourselves, in our considerations, on Russia and its long-term strategic interests. The proper question should, therefore, be: "To what degree is it possible to get the USA involved in the joint resolution of strategic tasks concerning our security?"

The rupture that occurred between Putin and the "elite" over the approach to the eternal problem of "Russia and the West", was not only of a political but also of a psychological nature. So, it is opportune to refer, at this point, to the book written about Putin by the German political analyst, Alexander Rarr, under a rather appropriate title: "A German in the Kremlin". As has become common knowledge, the book is liked so much by the leading character, that Rarr was invited to a special dinner party for two at the Kremlin. For Russians, "A German in the Kremlin" immediately brings to mind the classic couple in Russian literature of Oblomov and Stoltz, namely the Russian landowner and his German supervisor. (A. Goncharov "Oblomov")

It is not difficult to imagine how it would have been for "Oblomov in the Kremlin", especially since there are so many Oblomovs in the corridors of the Kremlin. Oblomov would talk endlessly and in depth about the greatness of Russia and about its geopolitical interests in Central Asia, about how "impossible" it would be "to imagine, even hypothetically, the presence of NATO troops on the soil of the CIS countries", about the events of 9.11 as a devastating breakdown of the unipolar model of the world and the victory of the "multi-polar" concept; about how "sorry" he is "for the Americans, but not for America", and about the necessity of solidarity with our traditional allies in the Islamic world, and so on.

If the American operation in Afghanistan were to fail on account of Russia's non-cooperation, and the Taliban and Al-Qaida terrorists were to thrust northward elated by their success, the Oblomovs would deploy tens of thousands of poorly armed, unprepared Russian soldiers to plug the hole with their own bodies, in what would be Russia's ultimate war.

Putin-Stoltz, on the contrary, being a cool pragmatist and having reviewed bundles of book-keeper's calculations, logically reasoned that one should not miss the chance that was being offered to take advantage of the military, economic and political resources by the only superpower of the world, to fulfil one of the Russia's national security most important objectives – to do away with the hotbed threatening its security in the South.

However the brandishing price lists Russian political elite is irritated and, hunched over the trough of Russia's economy, which she herself has destroyed, she demands the Greatness right away.

But, first, there is necessary to work hard for the Greatness. Second, by joining the global coalition, our Stoltz in the Kremlin, established, by skillfully utilizing Russia's historical and geographical resources, a new security framework in which Russia's role could be incomparably more significant than its present economic potential has to offer.

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The short span of historical time from 11 September 2001 to 24 May 2002--from the famous television statement by President V. Putin, "We are with you, Americans," to the signing of joint documents at the Moscow summit meeting--has been perceived as a period of enormous changes in the relations between the two countries--the transition from a cold world full of mutual suspicion to a world of partnership, and if the declaration on strategic partnership signed by President V. Putin and G. Bush (which, incidentally, as I have repeatedly determined, few people in Russia or in America have read) is to be taken seriously, a world of ally relations as well.

However how profound and lasting are these changes? Wasn't the rapid Russian-American rapprochement merely a response to the situational interests of the leaders of the two countries at that moment? V. Putin had to present the Chechnya problem to the world community and the public opinion of his own country, which is extremely sensitive to that problem, as a component part of the fight by all civilized humankind against international terrorism, and to present Russia as in the vanguard of this fight, the first to enter into the historical skirmish with the world evil. G. Bush needed a quick and impressive victory in the Afghan operation, which Russia could facilitate to no small degree. Both these goals were more or less achieved. What next?

Let us open «The Joint Declaration on New Strategic Relations Between the RF and the United States» and read a few phrases at random:

"The era when Russia and the United States considered one another the enemy or a strategic threat has ended: Russia and the United States are already acting as partners and friends, providing a response to the new challenges of the 21st century, and our countries are already allies in the global fight against international terrorism. In Central Asia and in the South Caucasus, we recognize our common interest in promoting the stable sovereignty and territorial integrity of all the states of this region. Russia and the United States reject the model of rivalry of the 'great powers,' whose bankruptcy has been demonstrated. To an ever-greater degree, Russia and the members of NATO are acting as allies in the fight against terrorism, regional instability, and other contemporary threats."

If we have still not been completely convinced of the friendly, ally relations between Russia and the United States, let us listen to RF Foreign Minister I. Ivanov: "The threat to Russia is not a global nuclear disaster or aggression from the United States and NATO. The threat to Russia is in the Caucasus and on the Asian border." Or finally, President V. Putin, who in his statement at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "a trusting partnership between Russia and the United States is one of the top priorities of Russian foreign policy" and that "between Russia and the United States, there is a common view of the threats to international security."

Such is the official formal nature of our interrelations. But let us take any article, item, information, or commentary on the international problem area from any of our newspapers, from the patriotic *Zavtra* to the liberal *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, or any television program from "Russkiy Dom" [Russian Home] to "Postkriptum" [Postscript]. Almost all of them are profoundly, emotionally, and passionately anti-American. Any military or economic, real or imaginary, failures of our "ally" are joyfully savored, and its insidious plans are constantly being exposed. Ambitious Russian Achilles, despaired of ever surpassing the Portuguese turtle, await the fall of the dollar from day to day and the collapse of the American economy with longing, just as their grandfathers waited for their beloved world revolution, and their fathers--victory in the world contest with capitalism.

The left wing of the political class at the same time openly and consistently accuses V. Putin of betraying national interests. The eternally servile establishment quietly grumbles and whispers, but so far has not found the resolve to openly challenge the president. Its most refined scholastic writers, reassuring themselves, try to find differences in principle between the treasonous "Kozyrev approach" and Putin's great power-patriotic approach. Overall the sentiments of the "elite" can still be expressed by the formula which I wrote of back a few months ago--"We completely approve and support the treasonous, anti-people's foreign policy course of President V. Putin."

The president's drive to the West has not had the least effect on his Russia-wide rating. First, this rating is determined above all by the fact that--at least until recently--millions of people were receiving their wages and pensions on time, which was seen almost as an economic miracle compared to Yeltsin's times.

Secondly, this is once again evidence (as is also confirmed by special polls, for example, the recent study by I. Klyamkin and T. Kutkovets, *Moskovskiy Novosti*, 2002 No 25) that anti-Western and anti-American complexes and passions are raging most fearsomely right in those upper rarified strata of the elite among whom it is customary to send the women to American clinics to have their babies and to send their children to study in American universities. Only through the massive use of television-based zombie-fication and only for a very short time can these sentiments sometimes be spread to broad strata of the population. The latest such incidents of hysterical rage of the patriotic womb were

coverage by the mass media of the Winter Olympics and their provocative behavior during the world soccer championships, which led to a shameful pogrom in the center of Moscow

Anti-Americanism is not a social uprising of the deprived; it is, if you will, a metaphysical uprising of people who are actually even very well-to-do and privileged, but are deeply hurt and suffering from their own perception of their secondary, impaired status.

And that is not just a Russian, but a world phenomenon. Leaf through the French or German press. It is literally seething with anti-Americanism. To the European elite, it was not 11 September that was a real shock, but the demonstration of American military might during the operation in Afghanistan, where the forces of the United States' European allies, other than Great Britain, were simply unwanted.

The experience of this operation made ambitious Europeans face the painful questions of the status of the European Union, the future of their armies and the military-industrial complex, and the sense of their defense policy in general.

And in fact, if one recalls those who attacked New York and Washington on 11 September, they were people who belonged to the upper middle class of very wealthy Saudi Arabia who were flying the planes, and millionaires who supervised the operation. None of them gave a damn at all about their deprived Arab fellow-tribesmen. They were resolving their own deeply personal, status problems that wounded their egos. And that was why their fanaticism was so indomitable.

One of the British prime ministers, responding once to the question of why there is no anti-Semitism in England, answered that it was "because we English have never considered ourselves beneath the Jews."

So for the very same reason, there was no such festering, painful anti-Americanism in the Soviet Union. Yes, of course state anti-American propaganda was working at full capacity; that was not passion, however, but a routine front of the global Cold War which enemies who were strong and considered themselves equals were waging between themselves. Let us permit ourselves a mental experiment from the field of political fantasy. Let us assume that sometime in the early 80s of the past century, Islamic radicals (for example, the fanatics who came to power in Iran at that time) had delivered keenly felt blows simultaneously against both Satan No 1 (the United States) and Satan No 2 (the USSR). It is not impossible that a pragmatic Soviet-American antiterrorist alliance might have become established at that time in a more organic and painless way than today.

Undoubtedly a complex from defeat in the Cold War and defeat related to the serious and in many respects irreversible decline in Russia's global status holds sway over the collective subconscious of the Russian political class. To it the United States remains a phantom enemy that gives them meaning, and in heroic opposition to that enemy, all the myths of Russian foreign policy have been constructed.

How fundamental are those pragmatic reasons that nonetheless dictate the need for an alliance between Russia and the United States and the West, and can they overcome the negative energy of this complex? But before turning to this question, let us see how Russian-American relations and the principles declared in the joint declaration are perceived on the other side of the Atlantic, within the

American establishment. And what role does the complex of victors in the Cold War play there?

4

Until very recently a cloudless, almost euphoric vision of the state of American-Russian relations prevailed in the American establishment and media. Moscow supported the US operation in Afghanistan and had stopped the fruitless polemics over the missile defense treaty and the expansion of NATO. Vladimir, the friend and comrade in the fight against international terrorism, whose soul friend George had looked deeply into, is in firm control of the situation in Russia; and the visit to it was refreshingly pleasant after the chaotic scenes on the streets of Berlin and within the walls of the German parliament.

Such a happy view of the future of Russian-American relations was at the same time naive and arrogant. Naive because it did not take into account how the foreign policy course toward rapprochement and ally relations with the West was rather superficial and had still not taken root at all in the mentality of the Russian political class.

Arrogant because the leaders of the American political establishment, delighted with their "victory" in the Cold War and all subsequent conflicts and with the status of the only superpower--and how they love to call themselves the "indispensable nation"--did not bother with efforts to analyze what might actually be the national interests of the potential "ally" and how, relying on this understanding, you might oppose the chronic anti-American complexes if you really do want to acquire and keep an ally. In times that were more difficult for America when it could not afford such intellectual slackness, its leaders offered the world models of creative inventiveness. Just recall R. Nixon's visit to China in 1971, which upset the chessboard of world politics.

The global fight against terrorism cannot be a solid long-term basis for an alliance between Russia and the United States because of the growing erosion and vagueness of this concept itself. Most countries, including the United States and Russia, tailor their own traditional problems to the slogan of the fight against terrorism. Russia--the military conflict in Chechnya that has reached an impasse, and the United States--the planned operation to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Each has its own lists of favorite terrorists, and they certainly do not always coincide.

The article by Richard Haass, the State Department's director for political planning, under the symbolic title "Great Expectations Are Harmful" (*Moskovskiy Novosti*, 2002, No 28), was particularly revealing for Washington's "cool mentoring" relationship toward its Russian ally.

After recording the new character of Russian-American relations based on the joint fight against international terrorism at the start of the article, the author opens the subsequent paragraphs with the standard wording--Russia should, Russia should also, Russia must, and so forth. The problems of Russian cooperation with Iran and Iraq are put forth as the most persistent among these obligations. The article leaves the impression that the new ally is of interest to the United States only inasmuch as "ally relations" allow it to more successfully resolve the problems of Russian contacts with certain representatives of the "axis of evil" that bother the United States. And it is specifically these problems that--from Washington's viewpoint--are in fact the center of Russian-American relations.

Such an approach paradoxically corresponds to the well-known concept of a Russian politologist A. Migranyan (which I thoroughly examined in the article "Our Indignant Reason Rages" (Novaya Gazeta, 2002 No 25). The essence of it is that Russian foreign policy should create threats to the United States and the West in various regions of the world, then bargain for a "suitable entry into the European-Atlantic structures in exchange for abandoning these threats." The implementation of this concept can lead to anything at all, just not to the establishment of long-term, trusting relations of partnership. But it is difficult not to notice that the organic visceral anti-Americanism of a large part of the Russian political class and the arrogantly indifferent view of Russia by part of the American establishment feed on one another, together eroding the fragile fabric of the proclaimed Russian-American partnership.

If efforts to recognize and defend the common long-term geostrategic interests of Russia and the United States are not pitted against the rising political entropy, the opportunity to establish true ally relations between our countries and more generally between Russia and the West will be lost. There are people both in Washington and in Moscow who understand this very well.

Here, for example, is what Thomas Graham, the former deputy of the above-mentioned R. Haass and now an important official of the National Security Council, thinks on this score.

"The dogmatic application of radical market reforms may lead to Russia's losing its Far East region. One thing here is perfectly clear--stability in the Pacific Ocean region will be threatened if Russia's presence in Asia continues to weaken. The long-term strategic interests of the United States, and in fact of most Asian states, include the presence of a strong, economically prosperous Russia in East Asia. And if that is the case, why don't our two countries, based on our obvious common interests, ponder together how Russia can reconstruct its economy in the Far East in such a way that its sovereignty is reinforced in this region?"

The coincidence of Russian-American strategic interests in the Far East that T. Graham in Washington persistently recalls is not a geopolitical curiosity of the present day, but represents a fairly stable historical trend. Alarmed at the strengthening in the Pacific Ocean region of Japan after its victory in the 1904-1905 war with Russia, American diplomacy helped Witte (then Russian foreign minister) conclude a peace that was acceptable to Russia at that time. During the civil war in Russia, the United States conducted secret negotiations with the Bolsheviks in order to prevent the Japanization of the Far East and Siberia. The mission of American troops in Vladivostok was subordinated to this very task.

Today the situation on Russia's eastern borders resembles the situation in the south quite recently. There is a challenge that Russia cannot answer with its own efforts alone. Only in the case of Central Asia, this threat was military in nature, while in the case of the Far East, it is economic and demographic. The option of a response through our own efforts was formulated more than a year ago in the report of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy entitled "Siberia and the Far East in Russia of the 21st Century, Moscow, June 2001." "The persistent and progressive combination of an aging population with the mechanical outflow of population is shaping conditions where only foreign migration will prevent the enormous Siberian-Far Eastern spaces from becoming depopulated. Since the Chinese (and in the long-term other Eastern) migration is inevitable, purposeful explanatory-propaganda work must be organized to change public opinion in terms of eliminating the fear of the 'yellow peril' and forming a positive image of Eastern migrants" (see "China Is Inevitable," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14 August 2001).

This is a strategic program for Russia's surrender to China and its withdrawal from the Far East, and later from Siberia, at first de facto, and then de jure. This program would be enthusiastically accepted by those of our "statists" and "eurasians" for whom the most important thing is to oppose America at any price and to continue to threaten America with our wrinkled fist, even if it is from a Chinese column.

Just as it used to be in the south, the response to China's objective challenge cannot be given outside the European-Atlantic Community or outside a close political and economic alliance with the West and above all with its leading power, the United States. The direct or indirect absorption of Russia's East by China does not correspond to US interests, since it would mean the appearance of a new global superpower challenging the United States.

The prospects for an energy partnership of the two countries are also closely tied with the common interests of Russia and the United States in the Far East. The United States is trying to lessen its own dependence on deliveries of oil from the OPEC countries and primarily Saudi Arabia, which is actually the main financial sponsor of international Islamic terrorism. Russia is a natural potential ally of the United States in this project. Having identified itself with the industrial world and joined the International Energy Association, Russia can become the stabilizer of the world energy market by substantially expanding the share of its presence there. That will allow it to change from a country whose economy is critically dependent on an outside parameter independent of it (the price of oil) to a crucial part of the structure that to a significant degree determines this parameter.

Such a joint Russian-American project would require substantial investments in the infrastructure of the Russian fuel-energy complex in Siberia and the Far East, notably the construction of a pipeline from Angarsk to the Pacific Ocean, which would help revive the economies of these regions.

The future of Northeast Asia and the future of world energy markets are, in our opinion, fundamental spheres in which the interests of Russia and the United States objectively coincide and which may become the basis for a long-term pragmatic alliance. We certainly cannot say that the politicians and experts of both countries do not understand that. But on the official level, there is not enough political resolve to articulate these common interests clearly, precisely, and unequivocally. One gets the impression that both of them want to stop midway and preserve other alternatives. It is no secret that in Washington there is a fairly influential political school that would prefer to see the geopolitical structure of the 21st century as a kind of condominium of the two superpowers--the United States and "Greater China." As for domestic Scythians and Eurasians, they are legion.

5

Even if we take for granted that Russia is perceived itself as a part of Euro-Atlantic community there is another problem the Russian political class faces: positioning itself inside the triangle (US, EU, Russia).

Having proclaimed a global war on terrorism as its main aim, the United States has now reserved itself the right to not only decide who is a terrorist and which states are supporting terrorists, but also to make unilateral preventive strikes against them without waiting for the go ahead from the UN Security Council.

This policy goes a long way beyond the traditional interpretation of a nation's right to self-defense as set out in the UN charter, and it has met with opposition from a large section of public opinion in Western Europe.

What was the Russian political class's reaction to these developments within the European-Atlantic alliance, of which Russia was almost ready to call itself a part?

For a start, some in Russia noted with deep satisfaction that the sharp criticism of the U.S. administration in Europe is something that Russian diplomacy can use to its benefit. This is an accurate observation if the nature of this criticism and the benefits that Russia could stand to gain are correctly understood. Soviet and Russian diplomacy has already seen so many illusions dashed after the years in attempts to play on "trans-Atlantic contradictions between the imperialists."

Europe opposes not the United States, but the philosophy of unilateral decisions, including on military matters, professed by the current U.S. administration. This philosophy worries Europe, both for reasons of prestige and substance. No serious politician in Europe doubts for a minute that the EU and the United States are natural geopolitical allies. It is as allies that they are worried by America's "cowboy" behavior, because they fear that U.S. tactics and strategies could do damage to their alliance and to the long-term interests of the United States itself.

Though their debates can seem fierce at times, these are quarrels between geopolitical allies that share the values of the same civilization. Historically, Russia belongs to this same civilization, and it could play a positive role in these discussions by joining the Europeans in their attempts to have a moderating influence on Washington that sooner or later will make itself felt, all the more so as a large part of the American establishment shares Europe's concerns.

But Russia's strong state proponents are always looking for their own road, a road that only they seem able to see. Their reaction to the U.S. declaration on the possibility of launching unilateral preventive strikes was unanimous and quick in coming. It was a cry of, "we want to do it too" and calls for Russia to launch immediate strikes against the Pankisi Gorge and hammer home to the world its own right to do the same as the Americans, at least within the range of our backyard.

It's all very well that such statist ideas swell the fantasies of these impetuous swashbucklers fighting their strong state cause. But when there are two of these ideas, they don't sit comfortably in the one head. If Moscow opts for a poor parody of U.S. unilateral measures, it can forget about diplomatic benefits on the European scene. Europe is desperately trying to teach the rough and ready American cowboy some manners, but it would never forgive the decrepit Russian bear this bizarre attempt to legitimize the U.S. imperial approach.

This is all the more so as Russian foreign policy rhetoric has taken on a distinctly schizophrenic note of late. One day, Russia joins Europe in criticizing the unilateral leaning and arrogance of U.S. foreign policy, while the next day it accuses a decadent Europe of hypocrisy and failing to understand the significance of the fight against international terrorism that President Vladimir Putin is heroically waging alongside his big brother, George.

Diplomacy like this could see Russia lose everything it has gained over the last two years, both on the European front and in its relations with the United States.