

Let's Go to the Moon and Mars Together

By Thomas R. Pickering

Friday, August 8, 2008

The United States and Russia are slipping and sliding into a dark vortex together. If this continues, the results won't be pretty. Neither side can gain from the current downward spiral of bad relations. Both have much to gain from a cooperative future despite the many problem areas between them. The world continues to look to them for leadership, not squabbling. It has taken two sides to make things bad, and it will take two to bring them right.

It is time to look at this situation "straight up." It is getting late to make a change, but the coming elections in the United States hold out prospects, even if the present teams in power seem to be caught up in a mindless tit-for-tat framework.

What's wrong? The simple answer is too much -- too much old history, too much thinking about the present relationship in outdated zero-sum terms, too much retaliation and too little imagination and innovation in looking to the future.

Those sound like tough conclusions, but what do they really mean?

The United States still looks at Russia too much in Cold War terms -- as if nothing had really changed. For example, many Americans still use the term "Soviet Union" when they are talking about and asking questions concerning Russia. In addition, many in the United States view the country as an expansionist and nationalist monolith that poses a danger to itself and its friends in Europe. And they largely ignore Russia's positive contributions and accomplishments, such as its withdrawal from military bases in Cuba and Vietnam, its early offer of help and assistance after Sept. 11 and its economic recovery and growth to name just a few

For its part, Russia looks at the United States too often through "red-colored" glasses. NATO is still seen as the same old NATO that the Soviet propagandists made it out to be -- aggressive, threatening and a danger to Russia. Any enlargement of NATO still seems like a continuation of the Cold War on new grounds. The difficult period of the 1990s economic crises is viewed as U.S. machinations intent on humiliating Russia, instead of a natural consequence of the country's emergence from the economic and other failures of communism. U.S. actions in Afghanistan and Iraq are both seen as offensive, not defensive. Unlike the case of Iraq -- which most Americans now see as a bad mistake -- most Russians don't take into consideration that Afghanistan was, in fact, a large base and a refuge for the al-Qaida terrorists who attacked the United States.

Where can we go from here?

Continuing the status quo will take us further downhill. New approaches are necessary. We won't change easily the mind-sets outlined above, but we need to begin that process by first thinking before we speak about each other. Second, we need to look at the Cold War platitudes of the past as by-gones that neither accurately describe our current world nor the relationship we want to see prevail. This can lead as it must to a more fruitful dialogue and cooperation.

Both Russia and the United States enter the 21st century as great powers that will have much to say about the world and how it proceeds. They are joined by China, India, Japan, the European Union, Brazil and perhaps one or two others. Relations among them will be governed by the need to have a firm bilateral basis for cooperation and a developing commitment to solving key problems multilaterally.

The key to strong U.S.-Russian bilateral relations is the need to discover and develop a common positive agenda. The world will look to Russia and the United States to lead on nuclear disarmament with serious new cuts in weapons and delivery vehicles in the near future. Nuclear nonproliferation, U.S. ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and U.S.-Russian cooperation on a fissile-material production cutoff can do much to move us toward the goal of establishing a world without nukes -- an ambitious idea promoted by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry and former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz. Trade cooperation, Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization and more joint scientific research in aerospace and medicine mark out just a few of the special areas where we could both learn and lead together.

The next stage should be putting these steps into place, one by one.

These positive accomplishments will help to offset some of the negatives. We both need frank and open discussions about the rest of the world and its views on each others strategic interests, especially in the 'near abroad'. That may not produce an agreement, but it will at least foster understanding about where each would like to go and how and why.

Finally, we need once again "adult supervision." This is by no means meant as criticism of the present leaders in each country; in fact, they have been successful in preserving and strengthening cooperation much better than their subordinates. But U.S. President George W. Bush (and his successor come January), President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin should seriously consider appointing a senior figure holding their trust and confidence to oversee and manage the relationship. We need senior leaders on both sides who can take over the agenda and assure that projects are brought to completion. They also need to understand how to lead Cabinet members and private-sector leaders to improve U.S.-Russian relations if we are to avoid catastrophic competition and continued controversy.

And what about working with others? With better bilateral relations this should be easier. We should not get caught up on institutional frameworks. The United Nations Security Council and the Group of Eight sometimes works well and sometimes does not. There is a clear need for others to be part of key issues, such as climate change, trade, economic development, battling with AIDS or going to the moon and Mars.

There is much that must be done to improve U.S.-Russian relations, and with new administrations in place in both countries, the challenges will be significant. Let us all hope that the time for a turnaround has come at last. Despite manifold differences, our leaders can find new opportunities to do what we both do best -- cooperate for mutual gain.

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Another Hard Landing for Russia?

By Eugene Rumer

Wednesday, August 13, 2008

Russia's victory in Georgia is payback for years of geopolitical irrelevance, for Moscow's retreat from Eastern Europe and from the Soviet Union, for Western finger-wagging at Russian transgressions at home and abroad. Russia is back: Its gross domestic product has increased from \$200 billion in 1999 to \$1.2 trillion in 2007. Moscow has more money from oil and gas exports than it knows what to do with.

The Russian military is showing off its newfound strength, punishing the Georgians for their sins, the greatest of which is forgetting in whose back yard they live. Moscow has warned Poland and the Czech Republic not to deploy U.S. missile defense components on their territories. The Kremlin has also told Washington that it should mind its own business.

We have seen something like this before, though. Thirty years ago, flush with oil and gas revenue, the Soviet Union was threatening Europe and challenging the United States. In 1979, Soviet tanks rolled into Afghanistan and seemed poised to keep going to fulfill centuries-old Russian ambitions of reaching the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. The West could do nothing to stop Moscow's juggernaut unless it was willing to risk nuclear annihilation.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan drove the final nail into the coffin of detente -- a policy of tentative East-West rapprochement. It also marked the start of one of the frostiest chapters in the Cold War saga, which ended with the Soviet Union's collapse. A decade later, there would be no more Warsaw Pact. Europe would be sending humanitarian aid to Russia. The Soviet military would be defeated in Afghanistan. What caused all that? We are still not quite sure. The war in Afghanistan, excessive military spending, reliance on oil and gas exports for revenue, failure to reform the Soviet economy, and the lack of outlets for domestic opposition are all high on the list of regular suspects.

Fast-forward to 2008. Russia is riding high, making up for all that was lost in preceding decades. U.S. and European leaders are flummoxed by how to punish the rising giant that they also badly need -- to feed our oil addiction, to help us cut a deal with Iran and to go on buying our currency to keep its value from sliding further. But who is to say that Russia's victory in Georgia will not lead to another disaster in a few years?

There is plenty of trouble brewing in Russia, not unlike the trouble to which Moscow turned a blind eye 30 years ago, as its tanks rolled into Afghanistan and caused a break in relations with the West. The vast Russian military can crush Georgia's army of 35,000. But Russia's own North Caucasus region, just across the border from Georgia, has been a simmering cauldron for nearly two decades. The conditions in Russia look different from the conditions of 30 years ago, but Russia's reality is still grim. Moscow may have more billionaires than other European capitals, but the Russian population is still shrinking, the average Russian man is not expected to live past 60, oil still dominates the country's economic future, and the taps are running dry.

No matter how the current crisis is resolved, the consequences for East-West (that Cold War term again) relations will be far-reaching. The stain on Russia's reputation in the West will not be erased for years. It will take a very different -- and most improbable -- Russian attitude to repair the damage.

In the meantime, could it be that Russia, petro-confident and irredentist, seeking to reverse the record of the past two decades, is careering toward another 1989 or 1991? Will it heed the lessons of the Soviet era? What will happen if it does not? Will the North Caucasus break out of Moscow's grip? Will the Far East turn into a Chinese colony? Will the West once again confront the prospect of Moscow's former satrapies suddenly becoming major nuclear powers? Will the specter of Russian "loose nukes" keep haunting the West?

It will take skill and patience to get Russia to a soft landing from its present high. Moscow's record at soft landings is not good. The consequences of it landing hard will be felt far beyond its borders. We should be thinking about that, even if the Russians are not.

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Russia's Ominous New Doctrine?

By Strobe Talbott

Friday, August 15, 2008

Russia has been justifying its rampage through Georgia as a "peacekeeping" operation to end the Tbilisi government's "genocide" and "ethnic cleansing" of South Ossetia. That terminology deliberately echoes U.S. and NATO language during their 1999 bombing campaign against Serbia, which resulted in the independence of Kosovo. Essentially, it's payback time for a grievance that Russia has borne against the West for nine years. The Russians are relying on the conceit that Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili is today's equivalent of Slobodan Milosevic, and that the South Ossetians are (or were until their rescue by the latter-day Red Army last week) being victimized by Tbilisi the way the Kosovar Albanians suffered under Belgrade.

This analogy turns reality, and history, upside down. Only after exhausting every attempt at diplomacy did NATO go to war over Kosovo. It did so because the formerly "autonomous" province of Serbia was under the heel of Belgrade and the Milosevic regime was running amok there, killing ethnic Albanians and throwing them out of their homes. By contrast, South Ossetia -- even though it is on Georgian territory -- has long been a Russian protectorate, beyond the reach of Saakashvili's government.

An accurate comparison between the Balkan disasters of the 1990s and the one now playing out in the Caucasus underscores what is most ominous about current Russian policy. Seventeen years ago, the Soviet Union came apart at the seams more or less peacefully. That was overwhelmingly because Boris Yeltsin insisted on converting the old inter-republic boundaries into new international ones. In doing so, he kept in check the forces of revanchism among communists and nationalists in the Russian parliament (which went by the appropriately atavistic name "the Supreme Soviet").

Meanwhile, Yugoslavia collapsed into bloody chaos because its leaders engaged in an ethnically and religiously based land-grab. Milosevic, as the best-armed of the lot, tried to carve a "Greater Serbia" out of the flanks of Bosnia and Croatia. If Yeltsin had gone that route, seeking to create a Greater Russia that incorporated Belarus and the parts of Ukraine, northern Kazakhstan and the Baltic states populated by Russian speakers, there could have been conflict across 11 time zones with tens of thousands of nuclear weapons in the mix.

A question that looms large in the wake of the past week is whether Russian policy has changed with regard to the permanence of borders. That seemed to be what Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was hinting yesterday when he said, "You can forget about any discussion of Georgia's territorial integrity." He ridiculed "the logic of forcing South Ossetia and Abkhazia to return to being part of the Georgian state."

Lavrov is a careful and experienced diplomat, not given to shooting off his mouth. That makes his comments all the more unsettling. If he has given the world a glimpse of the Russian endgame, it's dangerous in its own right and in the precedent it would set. South Ossetia and Abkhazia might be set up as supposedly independent countries ("just like Kosovo," the Russians would say) -- but

would in fact be satrapies of Russia. While Russia might see that outcome as proof of its comeback as a major power, the Balkanization of the Caucasus may not end there: Chechnya is just one of several regions on Russian territory that are seething with resentment against the Kremlin and that might hanker after a version of independence far less to Moscow's liking than what may be contemplated for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Among Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's important tasks in the days ahead is to get clarity on whether a Lavrov doctrine has replaced the Yeltsin one of 16 years ago. If so, big trouble looms -- including for Russia. Moscow's action and rhetoric of the past week have highlighted yet another, potentially more consequential respect in which this episode could bode ill for all concerned. For the Bush administration -- and those of Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush as well -- the fundamental premise of American policy has been that Russia has put its Soviet past behind it and is committed, eventually, to integrating itself into Europe and the political, economic and ideological (as opposed to the geographical) "West."

Prominent Russians have said as much. In one of my first meetings with Vladimir Putin, before he became president, he spoke of his country's *zapadnichestvo*, its Western vocation. Yet it now appears that beyond the undisguised animosity that Putin bears toward Saakashvili, he and his government regard Georgia's pro-Western bent and its aspiration to join two Western institutions, NATO and the European Union, as, literally, a *casus belli*. If that is the case, the next U.S. administration -- the fourth to deal with post-Soviet Russia -- will have to reexamine the underlying basis for the whole idea of partnership with that country and its continuing integration into a rule-based international community.

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One Way to Save the Relationship

Rose Gottemoeller

Wednesday, August 27, 2008

For anyone who cares deeply about U.S.-Russian relations, events in Georgia are a great tragedy, as they are for the inhabitants of the region -- the Ossetians, Abkhaz, Georgians and Russians alike. Against the backdrop of this war, the agenda for cooperation with Russia is quickly being thrown into doubt.

Therein the tragedy, because the United States and Russia are major players in the international arena, and so much depends on their ability to work together to solve critical problems. Although tough talk in capitals seems to belie the fact, new models of cooperation -- namely, in nonproliferation policy and in the corporate world -- had until now brought us far away from the Cold War.

Now we are facing the fallout from the war in Georgia, and the Cold War analogy is tempting. But we need to take a clear-eyed look at where our interests lie.

As we sort out the implications of this disaster, safe havens for cooperation still remain. The entire nuclear agenda is in this category, whether we are talking about a potential nuclear weapons program in Iran, the future of nuclear energy, the threat of nuclear terrorism around the world or the necessity of achieving further nuclear reductions in the United States and Russia.

Moscow and Washington have been working to replace the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, but this process will have to be accelerated if a replacement is to be ready before the treaty expires in December 2009. To ensure that this process continues, the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush should drop its long-standing opposition to a routine extension of START for five years.

According to existing treaty provisions, this decision must be made by this December, before the Bush team leaves office. The extension would in no way hamper the new U.S. administration from moving quickly to a fresh deal with the Russians, but it would ensure that START will not be trapped in the salvo of post-Georgia recriminations.

Nuclear weapons have nearly always been a haven for continued diplomacy, even when U.S.-Russian relations have deteriorated. But what can be done about conventional weapons, which pose the greatest threat to relations between Georgia and Russia?

Once tensions ease between Russia and Georgia, the two sides will presumably return to the negotiating table to try to resolve the problem that sparked the present conflict -- the existence of the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. At the same time, the broader question of European security arrangements will have to be addressed, but it is not easy to see how.

No single European institution is perfectly suited to working on this issue. The European Union lacks a seat for the United States, NATO lacks a unified view on its own future, and the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe does not have Russia as a full member. The Russians, for their part, claim that they have new ideas about how to organize Europe's security, but their invasion of Georgia doused any spark of interest in hearing them out.

In essence, a new consensus must now be brokered between Russia and its European neighbors, and the United States must have a vital role in the process. Given these requirements, the best choice may be to turn to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, or CFE. The CFE has led to the destruction of thousands of Cold War-era tanks and conventional weapons systems, and today it regulates deployments of conventional weapons in Europe.

The Russians, it must be said, ceased implementing the agreement one year ago, citing concerns about CFE limits on the Russian armed forces in the flank zones on Europe's periphery, an action that launched a new negotiation about the treaty's future. The Russian invasion of Georgia highlights the rationale for flank limits, so the Russians must now be challenged to make their case for changing the CFE treaty.

CFE is criticized for being overly technical, but perhaps serious technical discussions are a good thing among the parties at this highly charged moment.

These efforts not will succeed without sustained high-level attention. A risky but potentially big payoff strategy is needed, since political transitions are under way in both Russia and the United States. A bilateral presidential commission formed at the highest levels would be one way to go about it. Its mission would be two-pronged: first, to examine how to get relations back on track between the United States and Russia; and second, to provide high-level counsel to the difficult ongoing negotiations.

This commission would be of short duration, no more than six months in length. If they could be convinced to serve, the past presidents of the two countries would lend ideal authority to the effort. This group would include former Presidents Jimmy Carter, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton on the U.S. side. The problem, of course, would be an unbalanced situation on the Russian side, since former Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and Vladimir Putin are Russia's only living past leaders, and Putin is currently serving as prime minister. An answer to this problem may be to invite Putin to serve in ex officio status -- he would sustain the heft of the Russian premiership without unbalancing the commission's deliberations.

Although high-risk, the goal of such a commission would be profound: to salvage the U.S.-Russian relationship so that the two countries can cooperate closely on critical international issues.

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A Time for Restraint and Reflection

James Collins, Alexander Bessmertnykh, Yuri Dubinin, Arthur Hartman, Jack Matlock, Thomas Pickering

Friday, September 26, 2008

For two days last week we, former ambassadors to Washington and Moscow from Russia and the United States, held an intense and substantive discussion about the present state of U.S.-Russia relations and the immense challenges facing their long-term development.

We concluded that, despite the promise for constructive progress on bilateral matters following the 2008 Sochi Strategic Framework Declaration, the shock waves released by recent hostilities in the Caucasus have brought about an alarming downward spiral in relations.

We are gravely concerned that heated rhetoric today often seems to take the place of a thoughtful analysis of the common interests of the United States and the Russian Federation in the 21st century. Indeed, we believe that without urgent attention, our relations could lead to a protracted period of confrontation and counterproductive activity.

We noted that the present crisis has already had significant costs for our relations, including for the agenda set at Sochi, and that the present action-reaction dynamic risks inflicting more permanent damage, unless it is halted and reversed.

As a result, we urge that every effort be made now to relieve the immediate tensions surrounding the unstable situation in the Caucasus and to be cautious in actions that may exacerbate the present tense atmosphere.

As professionals who were deeply involved in efforts to end the Cold War and build a new cooperative relationship between our two countries, we call for action to avoid the repetition of past mistakes.

We further believe that recent events call for reflection and restraint by all sides. We believe that we are entering a period when new leadership in Moscow and Washington will face decisions that will reshape the U.S.-Russia agenda, set new priorities, and define the machinery we will use to conduct the business of our complex relationship.

We noted that the Caucasus conflict has brought to a head a variety of trends over the past few years that have altered in significant ways the environment within which our relations will develop further. Among these trends are Russia's political and economic recovery, the emergence of several significant new players in the global economy and international system, the evolution and growth of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, and the continuing existence of unresolved conflicts that may engage the United States and Russia.

We also devoted substantial attention to the elements of our bilateral agenda that clearly reflect mutual interests and that therefore will demand priority attention. Among these are:

The need to reach a better understanding about the forces and developments that are shaping the environment for U.S.-Russia relations;

An urgent need to preserve and update the future of strategic and other arms control agreements, as part of a comprehensive strategy to address issues surrounding nuclear energy and the prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;

Efforts to revitalize cooperation on issues affecting the security of the Euro-Atlantic region;

Agreeing on joint measures to address effectively the challenges of terrorism, regional rivalries and conflicts, financial, commercial and economic issues;

Joint work on global issues where our two nations have the responsibility to lead;

And insofar as possible, development of mutually understood rules of the road to guide our international actions in the future and to improve the prospects for cooperative solutions to international problems.

We agreed, finally, that new administrations in Washington and Moscow must create an improved institutional framework for consultations and negotiations.

That would allow us to sustain the flow of multi-layered negotiations and agreements, consultations and working-level discussions, as well as to support the implementation of programs agreed upon by both sides. U.S.-Russia relations will require that appropriate elements of government and the private sector should be mobilized to achieve success.

We also believe that there is an urgent need for expanded public dialogue, involving former government officials, academic experts, business leaders and other citizens, who want to contribute to the new agenda for our two countries. Russian-American relations should not be left hostage to political inertia.

As diplomats and practitioners who have experience in the management of U.S.-Russia relations over several decades, we believe that we are on the threshold of a time of decisions on the conduct of relations between our two nations in today's rapidly changing world.

Much has happened in the past two decades. Our world has seen transformational changes and the emergence of new and formidable challenges.

But we are one in our conviction that the United States and Russia, in an ever more interdependent world, have special responsibilities for leadership in critical international areas and that our capacity to work effectively together to deal with global, regional and bilateral issues can remain a positive force for global stability and well-being.

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Is Obama or McCain Better for Russia?

Rose Gottemoeller

Saturday, November 1, 2008

If Barack Obama is elected U.S. president on Tuesday, he will join President Dmitry Medvedev in becoming the first post-baby boom leader of his country. Both men were born in the 1960s -- well after the tumultuous post- World War II decade, when the United States and Soviet Union were preoccupied with nuclear arms races and a deep divide in Europe.

Their early careers show how different they are from their immediate predecessors, President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Although Bush did not go to Vietnam, his young life -- through his time in the Texas National Guard -- was shaped by that proxy struggle between the superpowers. And Putin, who served in the KGB in a small town in Germany, was on the front lines of the Cold War.

Obama, by contrast, spent the 1980s working in the neighborhoods of Chicago -- a different kind of battleground, formed in the race riots of the '60s and '70s. By the time Obama began his work, the violent struggle had abated but the problems had not, and his work was vital to developing new ideas that stressed not so much race as community solutions. This is one of the reasons that Obama can lay claim to being the United States' first post-racial leader.

Medvedev, for his part, spent the 1980s learning the lawyer's craft in Leningrad. By the time that city became St. Petersburg again, his career had been formed by studying and teaching law rather than climbing through the Communist Party hierarchy. Although Russian law is different from the Anglo-Saxon tradition, it still formed an intellectual system different from the Party's nomenklatura ladder. For that reason, Medvedev can lay claim to being Russia's first post-Communist leader.

Therefore, Obama and Medvedev have the potential to start a truly modern phase in the U.S.-Russian relationship, finally leaving the Cold War behind. This will not be easy, as the summer's tragic conflict in Georgia showed. In the aftermath of the fighting, voices could be heard in Washington, claiming that Russia is an untrustworthy, violent adversary and needs to be contained.

In Moscow, the voices were equally loud, proclaiming that the United States was trying to cling to its status of global gendarme, including in Russia's backyard. The bombers and naval ships that the Kremlin sent to Venezuela were supposed to convey that Russia would respond in the United States' backyard if the United States persisted in supporting Georgia and Ukraine.

Obama and Medvedev would do well early in their relationship to make some policy decisions that would sharply break with Cold War patterns. For example, although Obama would not have assumed command of the U.S. military when Russia's naval flotilla completes its exercises off Venezuela in mid-November, he could suggest that the Pentagon invite the Russian commanders to stop off at Central Command in Florida before their return to Russia. The purpose of the stop would be to discuss urgent issues that are engaging both navies, such as the piracy that is running rampant off Somalia.

And Medvedev, although he would have to push back against Kremlin hard-liners, could recommend that Moscow and Washington have some urgent issues to work on together with Tbilisi. Smuggling through South Ossetia has been a persistent problem, and it has at times involved that most dangerous of contraband -- fissile material that could be used to make nuclear bombs. Both Georgia and Russia have cooperated with the United States to build defenses against nuclear smuggling, and all three could cooperate to confront this terrible problem.

These two examples show clearly what must be done to get beyond the Cold War. They convey that Russia and the United States can cooperate rather than compete, even in their own backyards. Since Obama and Medvedev are so clearly of a new generation, they are the leaders who may finally succeed in breaking the old patterns.

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Ready for Re-engagement

By Angela Stent

Tuesday, November 11, 2008

Barack Obama won the presidential election because the American people strongly support change in both domestic and foreign policy. Apart from the global financial crisis, the major foreign policy issues in the campaign were Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, along with oil imports. But Russia suddenly catapulted to a high-priority issue after the outbreak of the war in the Caucasus. The five-day war led both candidates to criticize Russia, and it became an issue on the campaign trail after the Republicans criticized Obama for not being sufficiently tough on Russia. Now that the election is over and campaign rhetoric can recede, what is the outlook for U.S.-Russian relations under Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev, both of whom represent a new, post-Cold War generation?

The starting point for re-engagement will have to be a recognition that the premises on which much of Western policy toward Russia were based in the 1990s are no longer valid. Three consecutive U.S. presidents tried to integrate Russia into Western security structures as a partner that would eventually embrace the values and interests on which these institutions were based. But Russian leaders believed that they were being pressured into accepting an agenda largely determined by the West -- one in which they were not treated as equal participants. After a brief rapprochement following Russia's support for the United States in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, relations again soured. Even before the August war, the level of rhetoric and verbal attacks was increasing while actual contacts were diminishing. There were few stakeholders on either side in the bilateral relationship.

The August war served notice that Russia will follow its own path in the international arena and pursue what it sees as its own interests independent of Western-defined structures and values. Moreover, Russia is prepared to use a variety of means, including military force, to repel what it considers illegitimate U.S. interference in what Medvedev has described as Russia's "privileged interests." That was clear from his state-of-the-nation address on Wednesday, where Medvedev strongly criticized Washington for its support of Georgia before, during and after the war. At the same time, he also expressed hope that the new administration will make a choice in favor of fully fledged relations with Russia. When the Obama administration initiates a new dialogue with Russia, it will likely be based on a two-track policy: cooperate with Russia where bilateral interests converge, but agree to disagree on issues where both values and interests diverge.

Russia plays a significant role in the United States' top foreign policy priorities, including counterterrorism and counterproliferation -- especially the Iranian nuclear program. Russian cooperation is important in finding solutions to these two major security problems. Hence Obama's call for re-engaging Russia in negotiations on strategic arms control prior to the expiration of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 2009 and his commitment to finding more productive ways of dealing with Iran. Russia is also important in facilitating NATO's continued operations in Afghanistan, a war which will require more attention under the next president if the Taliban are not to return to power. These issues already provide a robust agenda for U.S.-Russian re-engagement, and they call for the establishment of a broader network of bilateral cooperative structures and a resumption of high-level contacts that were broken off in August.

Other issues will be more difficult, particularly the respective interests of Russia, Europe and the United States in the post-Soviet space. There are the thorny issues of further NATO enlargement, U.S. missile-defense deployments and oil and gas pipelines that bypass Russia. In addition, there are the fundamental issues of the rights and responsibilities of Russia, the European Union and their shared neighborhood and of the U.S. presence in Eurasia. Yet if there is no attempt to create a structured and sustained dialogue on these issues, tensions and opportunities for miscalculation will only increase. Perhaps these questions could be included in the discussions on a new European security treaty that Medvedev has proposed. The United States and its allies await further clarification on proposals for the new European security architecture.

Of course, the global financial crisis reminds us that there are new security challenges that Russia and the United States face, ones that might provide needed and fresh opportunities for cooperation. The Obama administration is likely to reach out to Russia soon. Let us hope that the Russian leadership is ready to respond.

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Fighting Pirates Instead of the United States

By Rose Gottemoeller

Tuesday, December 16, 2008

Two hundred years ago, the fledgling United States of America was struggling to make its mark on the world. The European powers weren't giving it much respect, and the threat of new conquest in the Americas was ever present -- and not only from the direction of Europe. Russia was pressing south from its imperial outposts in Alaska, and Spain was pressing north out of Mexico.

U.S. leaders wrestled these problems in two ways. The first was to project power abroad, and the second was to insist on a sphere of influence in the Americas. President Thomas Jefferson drove decisions to build a U.S. navy capable of taking on threats to U.S. commerce, and the worst threats of the day were the Barbary pirates off North Africa. President James Monroe declared a policy defying European countries to colonize or meddle in either North or South America -- the Monroe Doctrine.

Today, pirates and the Monroe Doctrine are in the news again, and it seems like we haven't progressed much in 200 years. This time, though, it is Russia that is struggling to make its mark on the world. After the August incursion into Georgia, the Kremlin declared that it would challenge any country that questioned its sphere of influence in the region. Following visits by U.S. Navy ships to Georgia, Moscow threw down the gauntlet to Washington, first sending bombers and then its own ships for exercises with the Venezuelan Navy. The Russians are calling it a challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, although the United States has so far either ignored or ridiculed the effort.

Across the world, modern-day Barbary pirates -- this time operating out of Somalia -- are threatening commerce by escalating attacks on maritime trade in the Gulf of Aden. This affects Russia's interests. When the Ukrainian ship *Faina*, which had Soviet-designed military equipment on board, was seized in late September, Moscow dispatched the frigate *Neustrashimy* to the region, to work with the U.S. 5th Fleet and a European Union task force that includes ships from the British, French and Spanish navies.

The contrast with the Venezuelan escapade could not be greater. Although Russia has not officially joined the task force, it is working with the other navies in a kind of division of labor. U.S. ships have surrounded the *Faina* to keep its cargo of weapons from being offloaded and, possibly, sold on to Islamist terrorist groups. The *Neustrashimy*, meanwhile, has joined the British Navy in escorting merchant ships and preventing pirate attacks. In mid-November, the *Neustrashimy*, together with the British frigate *HMS Cumberland*, thwarted two attacks on a Danish vessel.

Russia's partners have praised Moscow's efforts. As the spokesman for the 5th Fleet commented, "Just the fact that the *Neustrashimy* is ... supporting the counterpiracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden ... helps to counter the destabilizing impact on all of our international trade." Russia has responded by promising to increase its contribution. On Nov. 20, the commander-in-chief of the Navy, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, announced that the country would deploy warships on a regular basis to prevent pirate attacks.

What a contrast in Russian policies. In the Western hemisphere, Moscow conjures up the great power politics of the 19th century and attempts to replay Cold War games. Mercifully, the United States has responded with a light touch so far. Off the coast of Africa, however, Russia has joined with the navies of the United States, EU countries and India to confront a dire threat to the international order.

The Kremlin needs to decide which model to pursue, because it has painfully few resources available to defend its national interests. Should those scarce resources chase an ephemeral challenge to the United States, or should they concentrate on really tough problems that threaten the country's economic health and security? The answer is not difficult, especially since the tough problems allow Russia to develop a new way of working with its former adversaries from the Cold War.

Russia is in on the ground floor of international efforts to confront Somali piracy. If it plays its cards right, Russia's fleet could find its NATO counterparts, in effect, blessing Moscow's new interest in projecting naval power. They need help, and the Russian navy can provide it.

Dmitry Medvedev, who returned not long ago from Venezuela, has a serious choice to make. He can choose the Barbary pirates or the Monroe Doctrine. If I were him, I'd go with the pirates.

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