



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

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### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this testimony is to raise the following three questions about Russia today and then to offer brief answers to each. The focus here is on Russian foreign policy and its implications for relations with the United States, but I will be glad to address any questions on internal political developments as well.

- Should we care about what Russia does?
- What are the underlying dynamics of Russian-American relations today?
- Why have these relations deteriorated to the point that the U.S. Secretary of State has to travel to Moscow to deny that there is a 'new cold war'?

### II. THESIS

Since the USSR came into existence in 1917, relations between Russia and the United States have alternated between periods of competition and cooperation. My thesis is that whether relations have been cooperative or competitive has depended on the degree to which the leaders of the two sides have perceived that they have a common interest. Following 9/11, Presidents Putin and Bush found such a common cause in confronting Islamist terrorism which threatens the security of both sides. Despite the continued existence of this threat, the close cooperation which was evident in 2001 has given way to competition and tension by 2007. What happened and what are the implications for American policy?

### III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Initial American reaction to Soviet Russia was hostile. In 1917 the USA joined other European countries in efforts to weaken the Bolshevik regime. They originally supported a "cordon sanitaire" intended to isolate the Bolshevik government diplomatically. In fact, they refused to recognize the Communist government in Russia until 1933. In the nineteen thirties, however, both countries increasingly found a common interest in opposing the emergence of fascism in Europe. From 1941 to 1945 they entered into an alliance against Nazi Germany.

After 1945, relations between the Russia and the United State continued to alternate between

cooperation and competition. The period from 1945 to about 1965 was a time of great hostility known as the “cold war,” cold only because actual military conflict did not occur. The American policy was one of “containment” and was based on a perception of Soviet Russia as an expansionary power. Soviet Russia was seen as an imperialistic power whose global ambitions were justified by communist ideology. Soviet expansion could only be deterred by the threat of countervailing power. Containment theory received practical expression in Europe in the NATO alliance, the Marshall Plan, and the Truman Doctrine. It was later extended to alliances in Asia and the Middle East including Japan, Korea, SEATO and CENTO. By 1965, Soviet Russia was encircled by hostile alliances.

The initial phase of the cold war was replaced by a new period of cooperation known as *détente*. Again, cooperation was a result of a common interest, this time to control the growth of nuclear weapons. Although the recognition of this common interest can be seen in the 1967 Non Proliferation Treaty, *détente* reached its zenith with the SALT agreements of 1972. The ABM Treaty in particular was evidence that both sides accepted the concept of mutual assured destruction (MAD) which is based on the assumption that the security of each side depends on their continued ability to destroy each other. The other important result of *détente*, of course, was the political settlement in Europe known as the Helsinki agreement which was signed in 1975 and which signaled an acceptance by all parties of a territorial status quo in Europe.

By the late nineteen seventies, however, cooperation was replaced once again by competition. First, The Carter administration (1976-1980) made human rights issues a priority in its foreign policy and accused Soviet Russia of violating them by placing limits on Jewish emigration in particular. It was when Ronald Reagan became President in 1980, however, that relations became so confrontational that one can speak of a new “cold war.” Going beyond human rights issues, Reagan condemned communist Russia as an “evil empire” and abandoned the SALT process of limiting arms, arguing instead that nuclear arms must be reduced (START). Furthermore, Reagan insisted that the Soviet Union had forsaken *détente* by increasing its nuclear and conventional military forces and by seeking to export communism to other countries, notably in Afghanistan and in Central America. His response was to deploy a new generation of medium range missiles in Europe and to propose a comprehensive missile defense system known as SDI or “star wars.” By 1985, all negotiations between Russia and the United States had ended.

#### IV. PERESTROIKA: The End of the Cold War

The relations between Soviet Russia and the United States entered a new period of cooperation after Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985. This did not happen immediately. The first negotiations about nuclear weapons in Reykjavik, Iceland in 1986 ended in failure because President Reagan refused to give up his missile defense proposals. Gorbachev, however, adopted a new approach to Soviet foreign policy which he called “*novoye mishlenie*” or “new thinking.” New thinking was part of the broader program known as *perestroika*, the central goal of which was to modernize the economy and stimulate economic growth in the Soviet Union. According to new thinking, the division of the world into capitalist and socialist nations was no longer the most important characteristic of international relations; that was “old thinking”. In contrast to Brezhnev’s balance of power politics,

Gorbachev's vision of the world was global. For him, the principle fact of international relations in the late twentieth century is that all nations are interdependent. The great problems of the world such as security, economic growth, health, and ecology etc., could only be solved cooperatively, not by trying to gain a unilateral advantage. Economic growth would best be promoted not by a competition of systems but by economic integration, National security could best be achieved not by increasing military power, but by reducing armaments.

The application of new thinking to Soviet Russia's relations with Europe meant that, in place of a Europe divided into East and West, Russia would seek to create an "common European home" (obshe Evropekii dom). Such an integrated Europe would enable Russia, and the other socialist countries of Europe, to participate in the rapid economic expansion which was taking place in the West. For Russian-American relations, new thinking applied to security meant that under Gorbachev's leadership important agreements on reducing weapons could be achieved. The first break-through on this issue came in 1987 when the two countries signed the Intermediate Nuclear Force Agreement (INF) eliminating all medium range missiles in Europe. This was followed by the Conventional Forces in Europe Agreement (CFE) in 1990 and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) in 1991 along with other agreements on weapons.

Along with these remarkable achievements in the area of military relations, other issues that had been sources of conflict between Soviet Russia and the United States were also resolved. By 1989, the USSR had withdrawn from Afghanistan. The Berlin wall came down in the same year and free elections in the communist nations of East Europe brought non communist governments to power, for the most part, without violence. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the emergence of a new world order in which Russia would cooperate with the United States to preserve world peace was Soviet support at the United Nations for the use of force against Iraqi aggression in Kuwait.

In short, by 1991, all the major issues of contention between Russia and the United States were ended. It seemed that a new era of cooperation was in place. By the end of 1991, however, the reforms initiated under perestroika had the unintended consequence of destabilizing the Soviet Federation and, as we all know the USSR disintegrated into its fifteen constituent republics. By January 1 1992, Russia had emerged independently as the successor state to the Soviet Union. What would this mean for relations between our countries?

## V. POST COMMUNIST RUSSIA: The Yeltsin Years

At first, the cooperative relationship that had developed under perestroika continued to characterize relations between post communist Russia and the United States. President Yeltsin and his foreign minister, Andrei Kozyrev, seemed committed to a pro- western orientation. To become more western, the Russian government under the leadership of Yegor Gaidar began to replace the centrally planned economy with a free market, capitalist one. This was matched in the political sphere by efforts to build and strengthen democratic institutions.

There was other hard evidence of Russia's willingness to cooperate with the United States. For one thing, they continued to support UN sanctions against Iraq. In the area of nuclear arms

reduction, they joined with the USA and the former republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to sign a protocol to START I in Lisbon Portugal in 1992 which would enable START I to be implemented by returning all nuclear weapons in the former republics to Russia. In January 1993, shortly before he left office, President Bush signed the START II agreement with President Yeltsin which called for reducing nuclear weapons to half of their previous levels. To convince the Ukrainian Rada to ratify the Lisbon protocols, Yeltsin and Clinton negotiated the Trilateral Agreement of January 1994 so that Ukraine would transfer its nuclear missiles and fuel to Russia. Russian policy was so pro-western that initially, in early 1994, Kozyrev indicated that Russia would join in NATO's Partnership for Peace Program, a prelude to NATO expansion.

By the end of 1994, however, relations between our countries begin to change. Elections to the State Duma, the newly created Russian parliament, in December 1993 demonstrated that many people were dissatisfied with the transition to capitalism. There was increasing skepticism about whether democracy had improved their lives or not. For many, it seemed that although the collapse of the Soviet Union had been good for the West, the benefits for Russia were less clear. In foreign policy, this dissatisfaction gave rise to a growing debate over whether continued cooperation with the West served Russian national interests or not. Politicians like Gennadi Ziuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, journalists like Pavel Felengauer and academics such as Andranik Migranian, took an increasingly nationalistic view, rejecting the "Atlanticist" policies of Kozyrev and urging Russia to look after her own national interests regardless of what the West wanted. Because the pro-western orientation had become so unpopular, in January 1996 Yeltsin felt compelled to replace Kozyrev with Yevgeny Primakov, an Arab specialist and someone regarded as a realist in foreign policy.

The argument that American and Russian interests no longer coincided seems to me understandable from the Russian point of view. American criticism of Russia's actions in Chechnya in 1995 because of human rights issues echoed earlier American criticism during the Carter and Reagan years. By 1996 it was clear that NATO would expand to the East, and despite Russian objections, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic were invited to join in 1997. The use of NATO military forces against Serbia, first over Bosnia in 1994, but even more importantly over Kosovo in 1999 made Russia uneasy over the growing American willingness to use its superpower status regardless of Russian interests. So did growing differences over Russian relations with Iraq and Iran. As a result, although START II was ratified in the USA in 1995, the Russian State Duma refused to do so. Perhaps nothing made Russia more concerned about American intentions than the growing debate in the USA over developing a ballistic missile defense system in violation of the 1972 ABM treaty that had served as the basis of Russian American nuclear stability. By the time he left office on December 31, 1999, Yeltsin could accurately describe relations between East and West as a "cold peace."

## VI. PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATION: Putin and Bush

When Vladimir Putin became acting President of Russia on January 1, 2000, little was known in the United States about him or his views on foreign policy. What was known was that he was a former KGB officer who had been anointed by Yeltsin to be his successor and who had

made his reputation while Prime Minister by invading Chechnya and taking the capitol city of Grozny. The first sense of what direction he might take in foreign policy came even before his inauguration as President in May 2000 when he managed to achieve what Yeltsin could not: Duma ratification of START II, although with the condition that the ABM Treaty remain in force. This, coupled with his inaugural speech emphasizing the importance of economic growth and the need to integrate Russia's economy into the global economy, suggested a return to a more pro-western orientation. On the question of NATO expansion, he was pragmatic.

From the American side, the year 2000 was dominated by the race for President. Relations with Russia were not an important issue in the campaign, although there was some criticism directed by Bush towards Russian policies in Chechnya. After taking office in January 2001, the initial attitude of the Bush administration towards Russia was cool. Whereas the Clinton administration had sought to promote internal changes in Russia, Bush and his advisors, notably National Security Chair Condoleezza Rice, were interested only in Russia's external policies. By and large the attitude was that what Russia does didn't really matter very much. Russia lacked the economic and military ability to influence world affairs. At most, Russia could be a nuisance, but little more.

The general indifference towards Russia changed even before the events of September 11. During their first meeting in Slovenia in June 2001, Bush and Putin appeared to establish a warm personal relationship. According to Bush, "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straight forward and trustworthy... I was able to get a sense of his soul." It was after September 11, however, that the dynamics of Russian-American relations completely changed. Once again, it is because of the perception of leaders on both sides that they have a common interest, this time in defeating the terrorism associated with radical Islamic fundamentalism.

Following the attack on the World Trade Center, Putin was the first foreign leader to call Bush to offer sympathy. Moreover, he went beyond expressions of sympathy and despite criticism at home, he offered the USA support in five areas which were critical to American interests. On 24 September 2001 he announced a five part plan of assistance in fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. Russia would share intelligence with the USA, allow the USA to use Russian airspace, provide military assistance to the Northern Alliance, make bases available in Central Asia, and fly missions to rescue American soldiers if needed. Russia had clearly become an important ally of America in the war on terror.

Recognition of this new relationship could be seen in several ways. For one thing, the Bush administration became less publicly critical of the Russian version of the conflict in Chechnya. Bush also promised to get Congress to repeal the Jackson-Vanick amendment, a relic of the cold war, although it is something he has so far been unable to do. The growing friendship, personal as well as political, between the leaders of the two countries was apparent at the November 2001 summit in Texas during which the two leaders agreed in principle on a reduction of nuclear warheads to between 1700 and 2100 each. Despite Bush's desire to do this by a handshake, a more prudent Putin insisted on a written agreement. It was forthcoming in May 2002 when the two leaders signed the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) in Moscow.

However, from the Russian point of view, the benefits of cooperation with the USA have become increasingly uncertain because of other policies pursued by the Bush administration. Foremost among these was the withdrawal of the USA from the 1972 ABM treaty by May 2002 (thereby invalidating START II) and the planned expansion of NATO eastward. In November 2002, NATO invited seven former Soviet allies to join, including the three Baltic states which had formerly been Soviet republics and whose membership put NATO directly on Russia's borders for the first time. What really alarms Russia is discussion over possible NATO accession by Ukraine. A month after the NATO expansion, the European Union invited applications for membership from ten countries, eight of which were former Soviet allies, again including the Baltic states.

The most severe test of the new friendship, however, was Russia's unwillingness to back the USA in the war on Iraq in 2003. In March 2003, Putin indicated he would join France and China in casting a veto against an American resolution at the UN to use force to make Saddam Hussein comply with UN sanctions. What really seems to have prompted Russian concern was that Iraq represented the first major application of the Bush doctrine to the conduct of American foreign policy. From the Russian point of view, this departure from the policies of containment accepted by previous American administrations implied that the United States had abrogated to itself the right of pre-emption; that is, we would do what we wanted to, where and when we wanted to, and how we wanted to, unilaterally if necessary, to ensure American interests abroad. For many, countries, including Russia, this sounded like the assertion of the right to global hegemony.

In an angry speech at the 43rd annual Munich Conference on Security Policy in February of this year, Putin made his frustration with American policy abundantly clear. "Everything that is going on in the world today is the consequence of attempts to implement a unipolar concept of the world. And what is the result? Unilateral, often illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. On the contrary, they have caused new human tragedies and more tension" He went on to mention the United States directly: "Some norms – in fact almost the entire legal system of one country, primarily the United States, have crossed their national borders and are being imposed on other countries in all areas, economic, political, humanitarian. Who is going to like that?"

By taking the side of those who opposed American action in Iraq, Putin seriously risked rupturing the new cooperative relationship between the two countries. While this did not happen overnight – Bush and Putin exchanged reassurances about their cooperation during their meeting in St. Petersburg during that city's 300th anniversary in 2003 – events since then have accelerated the spiral of discontent. Among them is American criticism of Russia's willingness to help Iran develop a nuclear energy plant in the face of American concern that it will enable Iran to build nuclear weapons. Another is the US decision to install a missile defense shield in Poland and an early warning radar system in the Czech Republic which the Russians feel does nothing to protect Europe from missile fired by Iran or Korea, but are intended to undermine Russia's deterrent capability. Yet another thorn is the backing by the US, France, Britain and Germany for a UN Security Council resolution that would give independence to Serbia's Kosovo province. When you add to this the Bush administration's

persistent criticism of Russian democracy – notably at their summit in February 2005 - because it fails to meet American standards, Putin's harsh speech in Munich of February 10 of this year becomes more understandable.

Where do we go from here? Despite continuing differences over specific issues, the fact is that today, as in the past, Russian –American relations depend on the perception of common interests. For now, there remains a compelling common interest for both sides to cooperate, but this will not be easily achieved if the United States insists on going it alone. The coming year may offer the opportunity for a fresh start. There will be new presidents elected in both countries. From the Russian point of view, it doesn't matter whether the American president is a Republican or a Democrat, but on whether the new President continues to pursue a unilateral foreign policy.