

A First Glance at the New Administration's Policy Toward Russia

By Robert M. Cutler, Carleton University

It is difficult to say what any new administration's policy will be by the end of the president's term of office. However, there are some clear indications of the broad outlines of U.S. policy toward Russia under the Bush administration as it prepares to take office. This policy will not seek to present a cooperative image of the relationship, as has been so under the outgoing administration. Instead it will have a more overtly "realist" or "realpolitik" approach and will concentrate in the first instance upon European security and controlling arms proliferation.

The Bush administration will make no emotional investment in Putin as a person, in the manner of the Clinton administration's personal investment in Yeltsin. Nor will there be any attempt to support democratic transformations in Russia. There was some talk during the Bush campaign of going "outside Moscow" to create people-to-people exchanges, which nongovernmental organizations in fact already promote. The goal would be to create "a rising class of entrepreneurs and business people" who would "build a new Russian state." This interesting neo-Gorbachevian idea appears to promote the integration of Russian into a neoliberal world economic order.

By contrast, Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, has called for the suspension of IMF credits, which she supported until 1998. In fact, there will be some friction between the new administration and the IMF. Since macroeconomic indicators are set to turn more favorable in Russia in the near-term, the IMF wishes to stay engaged in order to be able to claim some credit for the success. However, the

new administration will assert that there is not much that the IMF can or should do.

The Bush administration will seek to develop a ballistic missile defense (BMD) and will say that Russia simply has to accept this. This will adversely affect American prestige, because it will threaten to violate the ABM Treaty. It will enable Putin, who has challenged Washington's BMD proposal by suggesting an alternative palatable to the Europeans and that preserves the ABM Treaty, to claim the moral high ground. This claim will have some effect on public opinion outside the United States, and it will permit Russia to further improve its relations with Europe. Regardless of what the incoming administration does about BMD, it is likely that Putin will deepen Russia's strategic cooperation with China.

One of the big unanswered questions is whether the science actually exists to implement even a modest missile defense system and, if it does, whether the cost can be reasonably projected. At any rate, Bush's invitation to Russia to cooperate in the development and deployment of a missile defense system will go unanswered. In his foreign policy speech of November 19, 1999, Bush stated that Russia could cooperate on missile defense systems, but "there is only one condition. Russia must break its dangerous habit of proliferation." Current tendencies in Russian foreign policy give no indication of such a movement.

Recent press coverage, keying off of Putin's visit to Cuba, suggests that Russia will not meet Bush's condition and instead has begun to reinvigorate relationships that flowered during the Soviet era. This view emphasizes Russia's renewed ties with such countries as North



Korea, Iran, Libya, and Iraq. Weapons sales and assistance in weapons development are part of at least some of these relations. Washington will place the burden on Moscow to demonstrate that weapons of mass destruction are not involved. (In some cases, they have seemed to be.) Yet, even if Moscow were to cease such assistance, it would not avow American pressure as the motive.

Putin has been travelling widely: Germany, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Japan, to name just a few places recently. New ties with "old Soviet friends" are only part of a generally heightened profile and newly energized diplomacy. Putin's America policy thus already foreshadows Bush's Russia policy: he will work with the other party when he deems it in his country's interest to do so, and he will go his own way otherwise, regardless of the other party's feelings. On balance, Putin may find U.S. cooperation less important than Bush

will find Russian cooperation. Russian elite opinion no longer ranks the United States among the top several countries with which good relations are considered important.

Putin has been adept, especially in Germany, at presenting Russia as an extension of Europe, seeking good political and economic relations with Europe itself. But highly influential figures in the Russian establishment enforce a Eurasianist (not Europeanist) foreign policy upon Putin, and it is unlikely that he would resist them if he could. There is a view that Putin is a Europeanist following a Eurasianist policy. However, observers with this view seem mainly to have a Eurocentric policy focus themselves. In fact, the Eurasian trend in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy dates back to Evgenii Primakov's rise to the post of foreign minister in the mid-1990s.

Under Putin, not just the formation but also the implementation of Russian foreign policy toward the

newly independent states has been delegated in significant part to the KGB successor organizations. Thus, for example, the very territorial integrity and political stability of Eduard Shevardnadze's Georgia are under sustained and increasing threats from shrewd and continual pressure exerted by the various security ministries headquartered in Moscow.

Perhaps the most dangerous blind spot amid the incoming administration's view of Russian affairs, then, is its inadequate understanding of the significance of the newly independent states, even European ones like Ukraine and the Baltics, not to mention the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Robert M. Cutler
 <rmc@alum.mit.edu> is Research Fellow, Institute of European and Russian Studies, Carleton University.

The Republican Rule

Visit our website to find this new page: <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/>

Visit this new *Foreign Policy In Focus* feature, offering you news and analysis about what we can expect from a government controlled by the likes of George W., the Cheneys, Dick Armeey, and Tom DeLay.

Military and Security

Bill Hartung	World Policy Institute
Chris Hellman	Center for Defense Information
Daryl Kimball	Coalition to Reduce Nuclear Dangers
Ian Williams	United Nations

Economy and Environment

Karen Hansen-Kuhn	Development Gap
David Hunter	Center for International Environmental Law
Carol Welch	Friends of the Earth

Regions

Bill Spencer	Washington Office on Latin America
Salih Booker	Africa Policy Information Center
John Gershman	Foreign Policy In Focus
Tomas Valasek	Center for Defense Information
Chris Toensing	<i>Middle East Report</i>