

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The relationship between Russia and the United States after September 11 has shifted dramatically from the end of the Cold War. Faced with economic recession, the Yeltsin Administration was overly accommodative to Washington, taking a Western approach as their preferred policy orientation. On the contrary, the United States treated Russia as a defeated enemy by forcing Russia to accept unpopular economic reforms and viewed Russia through the Old Cold War prism. This “lack of respect” circumstance gradually evolved over a decade, ushering in an assertive Russia.

It could be argued, however, that the political transition in Russia from Yeltsin to Putin could be more credible way to account for the policy shift. However, the “managed democracy” policy of Putin would not have been so successful if the majority of the country was opposed to the idea. As a fallen great power, Russia still cried for a major role powering international relations. And unlike post-war Germany and Japan, the United States did not engage in the reconstruction of the late arch nemesis. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the collapse of the Soviet Union was largely due to Gorbachev’s perception that Communism was bad for Russia. Instead of reaffirming such a message by promoting democracy and supporting Moscow to effectively cultivate a market economy, Washington actually foster to reemergence of ultra-nationalism and authoritarianism by forcing unpopular economic reforms.

The lack of respect, whether by prudent policy miscalculation or simple negligence, also deprived Washington of the opportunity to elevate its relationship with Moscow. The already auspicious personal relationship between Bush and Putin was further reinforced by the aftermath of September 11. Russia eagerly offered its cooperation in counter-terrorism long before and after the terrorist attack. The state of partnership against terrorism helped foster a mutual respect for each other. However, the rift between the two countries gained prominence again when the U.S. decided to take a unilateral approach in attacking Iraq and retaining its troops in Russia's "Near Abroad" region, completely disregarding Russia's opposition. It became clear that the counter-terrorism cooperation was merely the state of common threat perception, not an alliance.

Clashes between the United States and Russia are the byproduct of this lack of respect. After the September 11 attacks, the United States and its European allies expanded their presence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The only regularity from the 1990s was the ability of Russia to fight back. Russia was no longer disunited with the president-Duma division and was able to expand its own influence. With the surging price of energy, Russia's economy and military strength recovered. And the energy dependency of other countries on Russia allowed Moscow to gain new friends, and limit the resistance from Europe.

Currently, the relationship is at a state of symbolic conflict in power exposition. While both Bush and Putin remained persistent in their strategies, particularly regarding the missile defense system, a relatively cordial personal relationship was on display each time both leaders met. Remarkably, Bush complimented Putin for being

“very sincere” and “innovative” in their meeting in Kennebunkport. Moscow and Washington also agreed to sign a nuclear control agreement to replace START I, which will expire in 2009, to agree upon Iranian issue, and to promote nuclear energy cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Although, the characteristics of arm race, division in Europe, and major powers confrontation, could be comparable to the days of the Cold War, the reality seems to be less intimidating.

Russia post-September 11 is different from Russia post World War II. Even though Russia is more powerful than it was in the 1990s, it is still far from its former strength when it was the Soviet Union. Moreover, Russia is currently operating in a “centralized market economy”, not anti-free market Communism. Moscow has established its control over the business sector, but Russia is still dependent on international income and global stability to restore its economy. And Russia is still supportive regarding globally perceived threats, particularly terrorism. Although to some it seemed that Russia was on a different path from the Americans in addressing the issues of Kosovo’s independence and Iran’s nuclear ambitions, it really was not. In the first case, Russia logically opposes any conclusion of Kosovo’s status without the approval of Serbia, a concern shared by other states with secessionist experience. In the second case, Moscow and Washington both felt threatened by a nuclear Iran. The only difference was in the approach to achieve disarmament.

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<sup>1</sup> The Associated Press, “Despite friendly veneer, policy differences chill Bush-Putin relationship,” *International Herald Tribune* (1 July 2007), <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/07/02/america/NA-GEN-US-Bush-Putin.php>.

Recently, US-Soviet relations were strengthened by a breakthrough nuclear energy deal. In February 2008, Sergei Kiriyenko, Director of Russia's Rosatom, and Carlos Gutierrez, U.S. Commerce Secretary, signed a contract for the U.S. to purchase enriched uranium from Russia. The deal ended the 112% import tariff on Russian uranium and allowed Russia to access the massive American market (according to Sergei Kiriyenko, the deal is worth \$5-6 billion in only the first 5 years). In return, the U.S. will get a new source of uranium since the US Nuclear Energy Institute anticipates a uranium shortage in the U.S. in 2011.<sup>2</sup> The deal could force Washington to be more attentive to Moscow's concerns as it becomes more dependent on Russian energy in the same manner that Western Europe is.

But even a symbolic conflict can be problematic. Russia is clearly gathering allies to counter balance the U.S., not only at a regional scale but also on globally. Russia proposed the Tripartite Ministerial Meeting between Russia, China, and India. In the third meeting in October 2007, Russia, China, and India reiterated the importance of multipolarism. Although China is economically dependent on the American market and India on American support for nuclear development (Agreement 123), the meeting was, to some extent, a showcase to portray defiance of American supremacy. In the case of Washington's standoff with Moscow, the conflict between the two is not likely to erupt in the near future. But with Russia's successful effort to divide the world into pro-U.S. and anti-U.S. halves, the dispute could potentially cause greater global tension.

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<sup>2</sup> M K Bhadrakumar, "US-Russia nuclear deal upstages Iran," *Asia Times Online* (9 February 2008), [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/JB09Ak03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JB09Ak03.html).

In order to stem the conflict, Washington must change its disposition. American foreign policy must recognize Russia's major power status and take its concerns into account. With greater respect, ongoing cooperation and common threats such as terrorism, Iran, and nuclear proliferation, could be enhanced into an alliance. However, this approach does not insure that Russia would be less aggressive in the short term. Hence, the United States must also restore its legitimacy to assure that the division Russia is attempting to establish will not materialize, and if it does, the division must be modest. After having been challenged by the war in Iraq, American legitimacy must be reinvigorated through multilateralism in addressing global issues.

Although the process must be done mostly by Washington, it does not mean that Russia does not have to share responsibility for the current tension. But as the aggressive Russia was fostered by Washington's previous policy miscalculation, the problem is likely to be for the U.S. to initiate the solution.